

**A FOCUS GROUP OF ADOLESCENT HAITIAN IMMIGRANTS: FACTORS  
AFFECTING THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN A  
FLORIDA PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the College of Education  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term  
2006

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## **ABSTRACT**

The goal of this ethnographic research was to examine the perceptions of academic success of adolescent Haitian immigrant students who have arrived in the United States within the last five years and attend a public high school in Florida. The Haitian students were asked to explain the tensions they perceive between Haitian societal and educational norms and beliefs and American ones, and explain their perceptions and concerns regarding success. The importance of their perceptions as influences on their behavior was related to Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory. The relevance of certain questions concerning academic success for Haitian students was investigated through group interviews and focus group interviews textual data. The resulting qualitative exploratory study is meant to further our understandings of the Haitian students' perceived and real successes, as well as to further additive bicultural educational practice in public high school settings where Haitian students are found.

The literature review and results of this study found that there were many factors, student characteristics and student perceptions that could be used to explain Haitian immigrant adolescent student achievement in Florida public high school course work. Thirteen themes of concern to the students were developed in the data analysis.

The Haitian adolescent immigrant students are able to speak purposefully, cogently, powerfully and coherently (English-language skills permitting) on numerous questions surrounding their thoughts and perceptions about their own success, academically or in their future careers. We can see that these students are able to define and discuss issues, make plans and recommendations for their own success, and state what is available/helpful and what is lacking for them in their high school. Suggested uses for the study included making some suggestions for the reorganization and implementation of certain educational resources for these Haitian adolescent students, and also making recommendations for future research, including but not limited to a study examining, implementing and assessing a pilot program which increases the

career-counseling and vocational-planning resources available for these older secondary LEP students.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memories of my adored mother, Mercedes Rosalie Barber Yans, and my father, Edward Louis Yans. Thank you for teaching me through your shining examples about the need to have passion for what we do in life, and the values of work-ethic, integrity, sincerity, courage, tolerance, love, and hope.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my beloved children, Jérôme Edward, Michael Philippe, and Melody Laurel Adrienne. Thanks for putting up with me during the execution of my studies. I love you.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank the people without whom this study would not have been possible. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to those who were my cultural bridge-makers, explainers, interpreters, and helpers in intercultural meaning-making: Mr. Arsène Adolphe, Mr. Michel Ernst Lanoix, Mr. Max Pierre, Dr. Jean-Robert Cadely, Mr. Réginald Jean Pierre, and Mr. Leslie Jean Pierre.

Thanks so much, I am eternally grateful to my committee members: my brilliant, patient and gracious Chair, Dr. Kay Allen; and my thoughtful experts, Dr. Debra Giambo, Dr. Nancy Graham, and Dr. Marie Léticée. The triangulation of a study concerning the perceptions of limited English proficient immigrant adolescent students from Haiti in a public school setting could not have been successfully accomplished without your considerate eyes upon it. I would also like to thank Dr. Jennifer Deets for her influence, which taught me how to read ethnography and anthropology with scholarly yet vulnerable caring for its subjects.

Thank you to the school district personnel, and the staff and students of my high school for all their encouragement and support during my studies. I particularly wish to acknowledge and thank the students who are English Language Learners for their courage, merriment, motivation and *joie de vivre*.

Thanks to my friend and encourager, Dr. Eileen Deluca, for her inspirational work, her brilliant comments, and her tactful help, feedback and advice to me along my academic path (I love you, Doctor Ph.D., chica, and I hope one of us will always be ‘on the road’ for the other, snake to snake!). Thanks to my other academic and school-related

cheerleaders and friends: Dr. Candace Harper, Dr. George Iber, Nancy Dean, Dr. Jennifer Paull, soon-to-be-Dr. Mark Schuller, Hyppolite Pierre, Ana Maria Chaves, and Cindy Yans.

Thanks also goes to all the members of Cohort III of the UCF / FGCU joint doctoral program, without whose support and encouragement I'm sure I would have quit after one semester. Our bonding was deep and abiding, and provided a loving and caring atmosphere crucial to my success.

Thanks to Reggie for keeping me smiling. Thanks to Mr. Jean Kipfer for making sure I ate and slept during some of the years of my doctoral studies.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Limited English proficient (LEP) immigrant students face challenges in academic settings in the United States or other English-speaking countries, particularly those places with national or state education standards to be met for a secondary diploma. Research abounds on rates of second language acquisition, particularly on the acquisition of English for academic purposes, such as academic reading comprehension (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002; Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Cummins, 1984, 1989, and 1992; Hall & Verplaetse, 2000; Krashen, 1982 and 1985; Snow & Brinton, 1997; Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc., 1997). Acquisition of and functioning in a second language, often referred to as 'L2', is widely held to take from five to seven years, or even more, for academic purposes. Cummins's (1984, 1989) notion of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) argues that there is a difference between ordinary conversational needs and cognitive academic needs of students/learners, and that many limited English proficient students learn Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) within a relatively short period of time, approximately two years in school. However, these language skills are not sufficient for students to succeed in academic learning contexts. Instead, students need to develop Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) if they are to succeed in academic contexts (Cummins, 1992). The development of CALP in the L2 can take much longer, from five to seven years or more. Acquisition of English as a second language for academic purposes takes from five to

seven years, and is more difficult for older students than for younger ones (Collier, 1987; Collier, 1989; and Collier, 1992). Thus, adolescent immigrants who are not native speakers of the English language who enter schools in the state of Florida face obstacles and challenges when attempting to receive a high school diploma.

One subset of limited English proficient students are from the island country of Haiti. Most adolescent immigrants from the country of Haiti face even more particular challenges than many other groups of students coming to Florida schools. They are not English speakers, and they are even more poorly prepared than most foreign teenagers for the challenges and rigors of the Florida secondary education standards leading to the high school diploma. Their own country's, Haiti's, educational system is in long-term disarray, and has extensive and problematic issues, as are explained in this introductory chapter and the chapter reviewing the literature. In Haiti, they also have linguistic issues between their real native tongue, Haitian Creole, and their adopted and academically-taught language, French, as is also explained in the review of the literature chapter.

Haitian adolescent immigrant students have perceptions about education and success which are influenced by a number of very particular factors from their culture. Although this idea of culturally influencing factors is true of all foreign students, this particular study examines the factors influencing adolescent students of Haitian immigrant origin, relates these factors to their thoughts and perceptions, and hence to their behaviors in an academic setting. In the second chapter, some of the factors that influence the perceptions of the students are discussed. The Haitian students may have learned some coping skills and academic behaviors which are not all that helpful to them in Florida high schools. The focus in Haitian society is on looking or appearing

successful (posturing success) rather than on measurable reality. Further, the focus of Haitian educational attainment in some sectors of Haitian society is based on occupying a seat in a school, and memorization and recitation leading to “good grades”, rather than the students’ actual comprehension of the subject-matters. Certain reality-based measures of academic success, such as we have in Florida high schools, clash with the passive-learner environment without critical thinking in many of the Haitian schools from which these students come to us.

In Florida high schools, across the content areas, teachers frequently ask verbal and written questions, on tests and other assessments, which are of higher order on Bloom’s Taxonomy, such as classification, analysis and synthesis questions. Reading tests of comprehension levels, which give reading Grade Equivalency, are administered in a scale from primary grades through secondary. All high school students are expected to achieve 24 high school credits, in a range of subjects, which are required by the state for the diploma. In order to graduate with a real diploma, the student must maintain a Grade Point Average (GPA) of at least 2.0 on a scale from 0 to 4.0. Finally, the state of Florida expects these LEP students from Haiti to take and pass the Florida Comprehension Achievement Tests (FCAT) in Math and Communication (Reading), on the 10<sup>th</sup> grade level, and passing scores on both of these exams are required for the secondary diploma. The FCAT exam in Reading tests such skills as: main idea and supporting detail; compare and contrast; cause and effect; author’s purpose; vocabulary in context; and inferencing. These reality-based measures of academic success (FCAT exam skills, reading grade equivalency scores, academic credits leading to GPA) are at odds with some of the Haitian adolescent students’ prior experiences with some of their

cultural-educational expectations and behaviors. Haitian LEP students' Florida-school-setting behaviors, influenced by Haitian cultural / educational factors, are potentially mismatched to reality-based Floridian assessment measures of success.

I have been a teacher in a program of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in a public high school of Lee County, Florida, for some years. Adolescent immigrant Haitian students are of great concern to me, because of the factors, issues and influences they bring with them from Haiti to the Florida high schools, and because of the percentage of these young Haitian men and women who do not achieve the high school diploma at the end of their secondary years. I wish to understand better these specific Haitian students with whom I work and have worked. I believe that I have built a framework of understanding of the factors that they have brought with them from their Haitian culture to the new educational setting in Florida, and their resultant behaviors.

### Significance of the Study

Albert Bandura's social-cognitive theory seeks to explain learning in the naturalistic setting, in the social and cultural milieu. The assumptions of social-cognitive theory address the nature of learning and the outcomes of learning. According to Bandura, the three major assumptions that support the principles of social-cognitive theory are: 1) The learner's cognitive processes and decision-making are important factors in learning; 2) the three-way interaction between the environment, personal factors and behavior are responsible for learning; and 3) the outcomes of learning are visual and verbal codes of behavior that may or may not be performed later (Bandura, 1986). The perceptions and



thinking of the Haitian students with whom I work may be important, because their behavior is influenced by their perceptions. These Haitian adolescent students have their particular issues due to particular influences, which affect their perceptions; and their perceptions may frequently regulate their behaviors. Studying their perceptions matters, because: “If they believe this, then they will act on it”. From the influencing factors impacting the Haitian students, some connections were made to their perceptions about academic success: what it is and how to achieve it. Studying the perceptions of the Haitian adolescent immigrant students is important because their perceptions direct their behavior. Grounded in Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986 and Bandura, 1999), the focus in this study is that the Haitian adolescent immigrant students are sometimes acting on their perceptions, as opposed to Florida high school reality-based measures, when it comes to their view of success and how to achieve it. I examined how many of the Haitian cultural / societal / educational influences and factors have impacted these students’ views of success, what it will look like for them, and how they will know when they have ‘got it’. The perceptions of a few specific adolescent Haitian immigrant students regarding their own success are elaborated in chapter five, in their own words. Their perceptions influence their behavior in the academic setting.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to make connections from the cultural and societal influences and factors impacting current Haitian adolescent immigrant students, to their perceptions about academic success in Florida – how to achieve it and what it looks like –

and how these perceptions impact their behaviors. All of the guiding questions of the research, and focus questions asked of the students in this study, are subsumed under this purpose.

The perceptions of, and beliefs about, the educational issues affecting their academic success, of adolescent Haitian immigrants who have arrived in the United States within the last five years were examined. The purpose of this study encompasses describing how a focus group of recently-arrived Haitian adolescent immigrants understand, explain, and possibly resolve the tensions between differing images of success. The perceptions and beliefs of the immigrant Haitian students themselves were considered, using their own words. The over-arching research question that was asked is, “What do the adolescent Haitian immigrant students themselves identify as their perceptions, beliefs and issues impacting their own academic success in a Florida public high school?” (Or put another way: according to Haitian adolescent immigrant students, what is the purpose of education and what does their success at this education ‘look like’?)

The subordinate specific research questions to be addressed are:

1. What do Haitian immigrant students report that a successful student or a successful person should look, sound and act like?
2. How have Haitian immigrant students incorporated the concepts of literacy, content-area literacy, reading comprehension, and thinking/problem-solving skills into their perceptions and notions of success?
3. Do adolescent Haitian immigrant students, who have been formally educated in Haiti in French rather than in their Creole mother tongue, have certain expectations

(positive, negative or neutral) for their own levels of comprehension of academic subjects in an American high school?

4. What other concerns influence the development of Haitian immigrant students' perceptions of their own academic success?

5. What other tensions, if any, do Haitian immigrant students report between Haitian societal and educational norms and beliefs, and American ones, regarding 'success'?

This is an exploratory study. There is not a "problem" to be "solved", or a specific "condition" to be "remediated". The exploration of this study involves looking at some possible disconnects and mismatches in current local Haitian adolescent immigrants' perceptions and beliefs vis-à-vis academic success, and reality-based measures such as assessments of their reading comprehension (reading Grade Equivalency), high school credits earned, Grade Point Averages, FCAT scores, etc. The theoretical foundation that their beliefs and perceptions are significant (and impact their behavior and learning), comes from Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986 and 1999). Between American culture and Haitian culture, there are differences in what is perceived as salient. "It's not the functioning that's important [in Haiti], it's the appearance of functioning" (Professor Philippe Montas, State University of Haiti, personal communication, August 7, 2002). In planning for their future lives, some immigrant students operate for lengthy periods on entirely "Haitian" frames of reference regarding academic success or the appearance of success; some immigrant students perceive, 'buy in', and assimilate to more American frames of reference regarding measurement of success; and some immigrant students appear to blend and negotiate smoothly among

their heritage-culture perceptions and the American frames of reference regarding measurement of success. I have studied how Haitian cultural, social and educational inequalities manifest within these adolescents in the U.S. educational system, after immigration to SW Florida, and I have sought to “discover if there is a learned superficiality in their beliefs about education among Haitian immigrant adolescents” (M. Schuller, personal communication, April 12, 2004). The data analysis in Chapter Five is presented using Haitian students’ actual words, and my comments/analyses of what the students’ responses to the focus questions show. This is not mere reporting of the students’ words, since I have a general discussion for each theme, but also parenthetical comments that follow the quotes. These help the reader make sense of what the students are saying and how it relates either to the review of the literature or the Social Cognitive theoretical foundation.

#### Definition of Terms

Haitian – a person born in Haiti, either living in Haiti now or living anywhere else (including living in the United States)

Haitian-American - the children of Haitian immigrants, born in the United States

“Illegal” – an illegal alien is a person who is an undocumented alien, i.e. in the USA without the legal right to be here, or one who has entered the USA legally on a nonimmigrant visa and then overstayed that visa to remain in the country illegally

Recent immigrant – for the purposes of this study, one who has come to the USA within the last five years

## Grounding: Social Cognitive Theory

This study has been theoretically grounded in Albert Bandura's Social-Cognitive Theory, which addresses the role of perceptions and beliefs in behavior. The Social-Cognitive theory explains learning or behavior in the naturalistic setting, in the social milieu. In Bandura's view, there is a three-way interlocking relationship, referred to as reciprocal determinism, among the factors of the environment, the person's behavior, and the internal events that influence perceptions and actions (Bandura, 1986). The second chapter contains a review of the literature regarding Social Cognitive Theory and its implications for this ethnographical study. Reference is made to this Social-Cognitive theory to explain the Haitian students' perceptions of their own relative "success" as a function of the input from their Haitian culture, society, and peers, as well as the gradual integration of input from American teachers, peers and society, and how they make sense of these and act upon them. These are immigrant secondary students in flux, in important years of adaptation to changing and conflicting inputs, models and feedbacks from the two societal/cultural models, Haitian and American. In layman's terms, often what 'we' (Americans) think of as important, 'they' (Haitians) do not; and what 'they' think of as important, 'we' do not. How do they explain and resolve these tensions? How does their resolution of these tensions affect their own perceptions of and beliefs about their relative academic success? How do these perceptions, beliefs and resolutions affect their behaviors in the academic settings, including not only their in-school behaviors, but also

after-school behaviors like performance of homework, studying and study-skills, reading ability for knowledge-acquisition, and their career or college goals?

### Mixed Messages Received by Haitian Students

The perceptions of and beliefs about the educational issues affecting their academic success, of adolescent Haitian immigrants who have arrived in the United States within the last five years, have been examined. The research population currently attends, or just graduated from, a specific public high school in the state of Florida, and they were all between the ages of 14 and 18 when they immigrated to America from Haiti. They are all between the ages of 16 and 20 now. Some of them have just arrived very recently from Haiti, and others have been here in Florida up to five years. The central question that was asked is, what do the Haitian students themselves identify as issues affecting their own success in an American public secondary school? How do they perceive these issues, and what do they say that they believe about them? Phrased another way, according to these adolescent immigrant Haitian students, what is the purpose of their education?

The social impacts on Haitian immigrant adolescents include: shifting family structures and households; severe economic hardships; frequent political unrest and turmoil in a country-wide atmosphere of danger; a lack of governmental infrastructure in Haiti to provide basic services such as roads, electricity, education, justice, medical care or drinking water; and the different moral codes embedded in Haitian cultural values,

such as a class system of elitism, and notions of what a successful person should look, act and sound like. In Haitian culture, status and prestige, and the appearance of being successful, are extremely important; and it is widely acknowledged that this culture allows or tolerates much sham, pretense and posturing in these areas. What are the influences and impacts of these societal elements into the educational picture of Haitian adolescent refugees in a Florida public high school? How do these influences affect what Haitian adolescents think and believe about their own academic success?

Educationally, by the time they are adolescents, Haitian youth have received many mixed messages from the general society and the “schooling culture” around them in Haiti and within their Haitian extended families in America. Culturally speaking, one important message they have received can simply be articulated as the following: “The appearance of success is more important than success itself” (Professor Philippe Montas, State University of Haiti, personal communication, August 7, 2002). Haitian society overall places a high value on education, and Haitian people in general believe that education leads to success. But what do they mean by “success”? If education leads to success, what kind of education leads to what kind of success? Specifically speaking in the realm of education, the general concept of “what is education?” appears to be quite divergent in Haiti from the prevalent American view or understanding of the notion, particularly when conceptualizing “formal education.”

The areas of difference center primarily around the prevailing Haitian ideas as to: the worth/value/power of students’ physical presence in classes; what is accomplished or done (and by whom) in schools and classes; the nature of a student’s role in any class; the nature of a teacher’s role in any class; what it means ‘to learn’; what is literacy; how a

person learns; what assessment mechanisms are used for; in what situations it is acceptable to cheat; what constitutes proof of having been adequately educated; and if/how education leads to 'success' in life. Taken together, the Haitian adolescents' thoughts, perceptions and beliefs about these questions lead to a comprehension of their frames of reference regarding academic success and/or the appearance of success. (And are these two ideas interchangeable?) Naturally, if Haitian adolescents enter American public high schools with entirely different preconceptions in their minds than American teenagers as to what they are supposed to do to be academically successful, and even what their eventual success will 'look like', we must discover and address these attitudes of incoming immigrants in order to reduce the resulting educational mismatch. If these students are operating on a set of assumptions about the nature of education that do not match American educators' assumptions, especially as to the nature of their future academic success, and to what goals this success might lead, then we and they are perhaps working towards different goals, and these differences have not been defined or articulated.

If Haitian adolescent immigrant students believe that 'attending school' and 'occupying a seat in school' is, in and of itself, a successful behavior (or a behavior which will inherently lead them to future success), and if this perception is due to their uniquely Haitian societal/cultural/educational input, then we American educators have some work to do in order to educate the Haitian immigrant students and their community that this behavior (merely sitting in a classroom) is not sufficient in American culture to attain the desired goal. There are implications for the future success of Haitian



adolescents in their higher education, workforce and career goals, as well, but this study confines itself to the secondary-education realm of recent-immigrant teenagers.

### Different Measures of Academic Success

One salient area currently affecting Haitian teens in Florida public high schools is their level of literacy/reading comprehension, often as defined by high-stakes standardized testing assessments such as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) exam, the passing of which in Math and Communication (reading comprehension) is a condition of being able to receive the standard high school diploma. In any case, FCAT or not, standardized testing to gain a secondary diploma or not, it can probably be generally agreed that most American educators believe that “students must have a fundamental sense of literacy which encompasses not only the ability to read and write, but also to comprehend, interpret, analyze, and critique” (Norris & Phillips, 2003). Are there fundamental attitudes towards the nature of learning that are making Haitian immigrant teens in Florida unable or unwilling to change their approaches to their own personal learning, or perhaps even making them oblivious to the possible need to change? Are these adolescents engaging in metacognitive processes with regards to these issues, and if so, a) what are they thinking? and b) are they operationalizing their own schooling based on their conclusions?

It cannot be said that Haitian students are not motivated to ‘do well’; on the contrary, they are often very respectful and hard-working students when it comes to the investment of their time and energy. But perhaps their energy is being wasted or

misdirected. There may be some aspects of their notions about ‘what is learning’, ‘how to learn’ (or ‘how learning happens’), and ‘what constitutes success’ (or ‘what success looks like’) which are affecting their ability to change or assimilate gradually into the American cultural/educational paradigm of successful student performance.

The following quotation from a university-educated adult in Haiti may be illustrative and helpful to our understanding of the problem confronting the Haitian adolescents who go to school first in Haiti and then later immigrate to the United States:

*Ils pensent que s’ ils occupent des sièges dans les salles de l’école pendant un certain nombre d’années, ils deviennent des personnes ‘éduquées’. Meme s’ ils ne comprennent rien dans leurs classes! Ils n’ont aucune idée de qu’est-ce-que c’est la notion de la compréhension. Prennons le cas de mon frère Joseph. Il croit qu’il ‘apprend’ de l’anglais maintenant dans son cours d’anglais. Mais il ne comprend rien! Il est entrain de faire de la mémorisation d’anglais, sans en avoir la moindre compréhension de ce qu’il dit!* (Reginald Jean Pierre, personal communication, March 15, 2004).

[They think that if they occupy seats in classrooms of schools for a certain number of years, they become ‘educated people’. Even if they don’t understand anything in their classes! They have no idea what the notion of comprehension means. Take the case of my brother Joseph. He believes that he is ‘learning’ English now in his English course. But he doesn’t understand anything! He is just memorizing things in English, without having the slightest understanding of what he is saying!]

A Haitian-American educator living in Boston makes the following comments about the scholastic performance of the young Haitians she sees in her Massachusetts

community, and these comments could well be applied to the immigrant Haitian community in Florida as well:

“As an educator, thinking of the test scores and performance of K-12 blacks, in our case the Haitians, imagining what will the next generations look like; I am wondering if the focus of the majority of the voices that the Haitian community and the youth are listening to are not inclined towards learning and reading, and most Haitian homes have no books, what role models do the children have? What kinds of Haitians will we have 20, 30 years down the road? How can children be inspired to learn if most Haitians don’t have the habit of buying books, going to the library, or the museums, or new places” (Nekita Lamour, 2004, p.1).

Frequently, in content-area secondary classrooms in Florida where Haitian adolescent immigrants are to be found, not enough is known by their teachers concerning these students’ heritage culture and educational histories. “When a significant difference exists between students’ culture and the school’s culture, teachers can easily misread students’ aptitudes, intent or abilities” (Delpit, 1995, p.167). “If we know the intellectual legacies of students, we will gain insight into how to teach them” (Delpit, 1995, p.181). What are the academic, educational, intellectual, school-behavioral, and knowledge-base legacies of incoming immigrant Haitian adolescent students? How do these legacies affect their own perceptions of success in U.S. high schools?

## Haitian Students' Strengths and Weaknesses

There are different points of view about the current state of affairs of education in Haiti, and Haitian students' educational strengths and weaknesses, to be found in the literature and in the interviews in the field, as have been seen and compared during the literature review section. The domains of education, linguistics, sociology, politico-historical and others are so intertwined in the case of Haitian adolescents, that here in the introductory chapter there is a brief overview of certain issues and inputs relative to Haitian adolescent immigrants currently in Florida public high schools, in order to prepare the reader with some background knowledge.

We, as educators, do not want to make the mistake of assuming that there is only a 'Haitian-student-remediation' picture to be dealt with, and that education in Haiti is entirely lacking in the kinds of knowledge and skills useful in American secondary schools. This attitude would be culturally hegemonic and give us false (or negative) starting points for future work in approaching the success-goals and attitudes of Haitian immigrant students to those of the dominant American school-culture. "School programs aimed at immigrant students....are seldom based on an ethical understanding of how education is related to broader social and cultural relations, even though they may make use of a rhetoric of equality and opportunity and claim to prepare students for academic success" (Valdes, 2001, p. 155). Implications of both Delpit's and Valdes' statements can be made, when we examine them with an eye towards elaborating educational practitioners' knowledge concerning Haitian-born adolescent students. We would like for Haitian students to be able to keep their vibrant home culture alive and intact, AND to

be aware of the differences in what constitutes success both in their own culture and in American education's eyes, in the form of furthering additive bicultural educational practice and their own successes. Scholars writing or lecturing recently in Haitian Studies represent a wide spectrum of thought concerning the intellectual or academic legacy of Haitian teens. Hudicourt-Barnes discussed one source of "discrepancy" between American educators' expectations and the assessments of Haitian students' abilities:

"We find that the Haitian children participate in animated and sophisticated arguments about scientific phenomena. We think their participation mirrors everyday Haitian culture and is congruent with a scientific search for meaning and the construction of knowledge. We have typically found Haitian children to be both highly competent and highly verbal. We suggest that tasks that are designed to elicit Western literate modes of language will inevitably find discrepancies in the performance of children from diverse backgrounds. It would be a mistake to equate these discrepancies with a lack of cognitive or linguistic ability. We worry that this.... does not make visible the considerable intellectual and verbal fluency of these children...." (Hudicourt-Barnes, 2003, p.90).

On the other hand, on a more discouraging note, Renote Jean-Francois commented, "These are students with experiences of emphasizing their flaws and minimizing their potential. They are resistant to autonomy in learning activities" (Jean-François, 2003).

Within the realm of classroom observation, over and over again in the Florida public high school classroom, as the Creole-speaking assistants/translators help the freshman, sophomore, junior and senior Haitian high school students to understand and accomplish

the tasks and assignments of their content-area subjects, the assistants are heard reporting, for example, “This Economics assignment was easy for him [the Haitian student] to do, once he understood what he had to do!” After several years in the Florida public school system, the underlying themes that are seen and heard reflected with adolescent immigrant Haitian students are: their willingness to do the academic work; their relative incomprehension of exactly what it is that a content-area teacher is asking them to do; their relative ‘helplessness’ when there is apparently nothing (inherent in an assignment) available or appropriate to be memorized or copied or recited (as they would formerly have relied upon doing when in schools in Haiti); their continuing need for Creole translation and, more importantly, for “explanations” from the Haitian-American adult classroom assistants (paraprofessionals) of what our Florida-school assignments consist of actually ‘doing’ or ‘executing’ in order to please the teacher and get good grades.

One decided strength that the Haitian students bring with them is their ability to memorize large chunks of material. They have been trained from their earliest childhood schooling that the concept of “learning” is equal not to “understanding”, but to “memorizing”. They can ace any vocabulary test in a Florida high school by memorizing the new words and their definitions and reproducing these verbatim on paper. Most Haitian students are able to get a grade of 100% on any test in any academic content where there is material that they can study, which is to be memorized and reproduced, without higher-order critical thinking skills being needed.

## Schooling Culture in Haiti and Florida

The culture of Haiti today is one of a society which is descending into chaos, violence and anarchy (politically and socially speaking), and one in which the area of education has been suffering from neglect, lack of real reform, and an extreme lack of financial resources. It would be fair to say that several generations of Haitians are now suffering from the results of country-wide turmoil and poverty in the educational realm. Civan, Arthur and Mason have summed up some of the cultural, social and educational issues found in Haiti today. "Haiti's unique history has created a unique culture that is different from the Spanish Caribbean cultures and is dualistic in nature: European vs. African, French vs. Creole, mulatto elites vs. the black masses, urban vs. rural, Christianity vs. voodoo, etc." (Civan, 1994, p.10). "Statistics in Haiti are based on estimates, but a few of these give a sense of the precarious nature of the average Haitian's life: as many as seven out of ten adults are unemployed or do not have a regular occupation; at least six out of ten cannot read and write; more than a quarter of children suffer malnutrition; nearly half of the population has no health care and more than two-thirds have no access to drinking water" (Arthur, 2002, p.14).

"Today, the majority of Haitians receive no formal education, and only a small minority are educated beyond primary school. Modeled on the French system, the Haitian education system followed a classical curriculum. In recent years, there have been efforts to reform Haiti's educational system to make education more accessible to the poor and more relevant to their needs. The reforms, however, have been only partly

successful at best, and much of the old system remains in place throughout the country” (Civan, 1994, p.15).

Even though education is technically free in Haiti, it remains beyond the means of most Haitians, who cannot afford the supplemental fees, school supplies, and school uniforms required. Educational reform measures, especially the use of Haitian Creole as the language of instruction, have met with resistance. Mason in particular sums up both the current linguistic and educational situations in Haiti, wherein most Haitian families try to send their children to private schools (if they can possibly scrape together the tuition), hoping that their children will get a better education, because the state (public) schools are considered to be very poor quality.

“The day that the Haitian government accepts responsibility for formulating and administrating the educational system in Haiti (rather than ‘outsourcing’ it to every Tom, Dick and Harry NGO or independent entrepreneur), utilizing the ‘mother tongue’ of Haiti to provide a ‘foundation for learning’ baseline underneath the feet of her children, and then bringing them from that solid foundation to the acquisition of other languages relevant to the Haitian reality, Haiti’s kids (Haiti’s future) will have a decent chance” (Mason, 2004, p.2-3).

Civan also made comments that are pertinent to my own observations of Haitian students’ functioning in the first years in Florida high school after their immigration. “A major difference between the educational systems of the United States and Haiti is in styles of teaching and learning. The Haitian curriculum requires learning many subjects in detail. Rote learning and memorization are the norm. Haitian students are not used to the analysis and synthesis that U.S teachers expect of their students; they will also be



puzzled by the number of right answers that are sometimes possible. Haitian students must be overtly taught that thinking for oneself is highly valued in American schools” (Civan, 1994, p.17).

Haitian students may also at first be uncertain of how the disciplinary system functions, and what the discipline rules and expectations are in American public schools, as the rules are less obvious, sometimes less overtly stated, and/or irregularly enforced. Also, the consequences of school-rule infractions seem less dire to Haitian immigrant students than consequences and punishments in Haiti, where they would expect to be physically beaten as punishment for infractions of rules, beaten not only by a school administrator but also again at home by a parent or guardian. To shed some light on current disciplinary practice in Haitian schools, in an article on continuing education and development of Haitian school teachers from the Haitian daily newspaper *Le Nouvelliste* dated July 29, 2002, we find the following quotation: “Il est très important d’apprendre aux professeurs à enseigner sans utilisation du fouet [It is very important to teach the professors to teach without using a whip.]” (Merveille, 2002). The use of the “rigwaz” (short stiff braided-leather whip) to hit children’s hands, legs or thighs as punishment at school is still prevalent country-wide in Haiti. If they do not memorize their lessons or if they misbehave in their classrooms, they can be struck by their teachers. In the cases of more important infractions or older (bigger) students, they are whipped by the administrators of schools instead of by their teachers. In both of these cases, the pupils also expect another beating from a parent or guardian when they get home, beating which they receive, apparently, for two reasons: to reinforce the ‘value’ of the punishment/consequence from the school, and also BECAUSE they got in trouble at

school in the first place. If a parent in Haiti has had to go to the school to fetch their student away, in the case of a severe infraction meriting suspension or expulsion, that child will expect a very severe beating at home. Haitian immigrant students who I teach in Florida usually still expect a beating at home if they get in trouble at school due to infractions of rules, or if they get very bad grades, or are caught cheating, or are suspended, etc. One of my Haitian classroom aides (paraprofessionals) has reported having to witness terrible beatings of our students when he visits homes after an infraction of the rules has been committed. So the types of punishments that Florida high schools typically engage in: Internal Suspension Room time-out, Saturday school, detention time after school, etc., which do not inflict physical pain, do not seem to “impress” the Haitian immigrant teens as much as the pain of the rigwaz strikes or more severe beatings they receive in Haiti.

### Créole and French

Besides the grounding in Haitian-culture research through literature in sociology, anthropology, history, immigrant studies, phenomenology, or any other field, it would be impossible to speak of Haitian educational systems and Haitian students’ academic achievements without a thorough understanding of the linguistic situation (French versus Creole) and its relationship to teaching and learning. The two official languages of Haiti are French and Haitian Creole. All Haitians speak Haitian Creole, while only about 10% of the population can be considered bilingual in French and Haitian Creole. More than half of this 10% is less than fluent in French. About 90% of

the population speaks Haitian Creole only. Even though strong emphasis has been placed on French as the language of instruction, 85% of Haiti's population do not speak it, either because they could not attend school for financial reasons (Haitian-Creole Resource Center, 1993) or because they did not learn French well enough for it to be an effective tool of communication.

“Traditionally, the two languages served different functions, with Haitian Creole the informal everyday language of all the people, regardless of social class, and French the language of formal situations: schools, newspapers, the law and courts, and official documents and decrees. Attitudes toward French and Haitian Creole have been slow to change. Ever since colonial times, fluency in French has served as an indicator of social class. Although Haitians of all classes take pride in their native language as a means of expression, many have built a mystique around French and perpetuated the myth of Haitian Creole as a non-language that has no rules. Almost all Haitian refugees will claim to be able to speak French even if they don't. There is still great controversy in Haiti over using Haitian Creole and teaching Haitian Creole literacy in schools” (Civan, 1994, p.16).

This controversy about teaching and learning in Haitian-Creole rages on unabated in 2005 in Haitian homes. The status and prestige issues bound up with the linguistic ones run very deep and are very enduring in Haitian culture.

In its 1996 publication, the Haitian Ministry of Education itself admits to the dichotomy between the native language (Creole) of the learners, and the

language and materials with which students are frequently taught in Haitian schools (French):

*“L’introduction du Créole comme langue maternelle d’enseignement est plutôt récente. La délimitation du champ de la didactique du Créole langue maternelle n’est pas encore faite par les didacticiens haïtiens. Le français a été pendant longtemps enseigné dans des écoles haïtiennes comme une langue première. Cette situation pédagogique ne tenait nullement de l’élève strictement créolophone. L’enfant haïtien est très peu exposé à la langue française de son professeur à l’école fondamentale. D’où la nécessité de renforcer l’environnement dans lequel on lui enseigne le français et de lui enseigner également à organiser sa réalité dans sa langue maternelle”* (Ministère de l’Education Nationale, 1996, p. 22 & p.13).

[The introduction of Creole as a mother-tongue to be taught in school is rather recent. The limits of the field of didactic materials in the Creole mother-tongue have not yet been determined by Haitian curriculum professionals. The French language was taught for a long time in Haitian schools as [if it were] a first language. That pedagogical situation did not take into account the children who were strictly Creole speakers. Haitian children at the elementary level do not have much exposure to their professors’ knowledge of the French language. Because of this, it is necessary to reinforce the environment in which French is taught to them, and also it is necessary to teach them how to organize their reality in their mother tongue.]

Due to background research in the field in Haiti in 2002, 2003 and 2004, I can attest that this controversy between Creole and French continues unabated in the general

population, among the poor and middle-class, and in the professional class, about the relative ‘value’, ‘worth’ or ‘status’ of the French language versus Haitian Creole. It is possible to have several random conversations per day in Haiti on this topic with almost anyone one meets, in any setting. Discourse with Haitian education professionals, and Haitian professionals (who attended Haitian universities) in other fields such as engineering or business administration, is laden with overt value-judgment statements about the relative importance and prestige status of communicating in, or learning in, one or the other language. Haitian people do not “hint” or “beat around the bush” about their value-judgments concerning the crucial nature of speaking good French in order to have or gain status, and the relative lower prestige of their own Creole language; they are perfectly clear and open on this topic. “There is an obsession with good French. You cannot make mistakes – it means you are dumb – you cannot afford to make mistakes of style or grammar – it’s the psychological aspect – they [the people] don’t want to be [thought of as] dumb!” (Remy, 2002).

Naturally these linguistic and status issues in Haiti are constantly intertwined with the educational domains, and vice-versa. Relative to the next illustrative anecdote, it is interesting to note that the child Ingrid being referred to was three years old and attended a private nursery school in Port-au-Prince: “Ingrid’s mother cannot speak French. She cannot help Ingrid with her education, with her schoolwork” (Reginald Jean Pierre, personal communication, March 17, 2004). The fact that Ingrid’s mother is literate in her own language, Haitian Creole, and could conceivably help a three-year-old child with such concepts as sound-letter correspondence, or learning numbers and counting, is apparently of no account *if these things are performed in the lower-status language*.

[Italics mine.] Ingrid's mother has also taken to beating Ingrid daily because she cannot read or sound out the beginning-French words that she is given at school to practice at home. It seems to be a widespread belief in Haiti that 'beating' a child will make him/her 'learn better' or will somehow be an effective influence on even a young child's academic performance.

These Creole or French linguistic/status/prestige issues seem to follow the Haitian immigrants into America, and linger on long after there could be any 'real', 'functional' use in maintaining them in the new society. Haitian adolescents, even those who have been here in Florida for three, four or five years, continue to refer to these in oblique ways. We have the following quote from a Haitian immigrant 17-year-old, Rodney [all students' names are pseudonyms], who has been in the USA for well over three years, upon attending a seminar in alternate careers in health-care settings and hearing about the possibility of a job as a translator in a local community hospital which receives many Haitian patients in its emergency room, "But do we have to be able to speak French to be hired?" (Rodney C., personal communication, February 6, 2004). The interesting thing about Rodney's question is that he lives in the community and he knows perfectly well that all the local Haitian people here speak Haitian Creole. His underlying assumption, even after three+ years in Florida, was that *to even be considered or hired by the hospital authorities* it would be a minimal job-expectation or requirement to have mastered some semblance of the French language, *even if functionally that was useless in the everyday operations of the interpreter's job.* [Italics mine.]

## Linguistics and Educational Situation in Haiti

Various Haitian professors have lectured and written recently on the linguistic and educational situation in Haitian schools. There are negative and positive statements, often in extremes, concerning the state of Haitian education in Haiti today. According to Dr. Pierre Vernet of the State University of Haiti, “Haitian children don’t know French but are taught in French. As the link between the brain (thinking) and first language acquisition develops, the child has to express logical operations and concepts in his own language. This language should come first” (Vernet, 2002). I observed first-hand in three different Haitian state [public] schools in June 2004, and witnessed the classroom teaching always conducted in French in, for example, a third-grade language arts lesson, a fifth-grade language arts lesson, a sixth-grade language arts lesson followed by a math lesson, a twelfth-grade philosophy lesson and an eleventh-grade language-arts/literature lesson.

One university professor commented, “We don’t have the materials to teach any level of school in Creole. We don’t have any books, text-books, and didactic materials about subjects for the primary school children. A grammar has been developed, and dictionaries exist. But we can’t teach with only them. There are no materials in Haiti to teach the children in Creole, on any level of school” (Professor Philippe Montas, State University of Haiti, personal communication, August 7, 2002). And here is what was said about availability of books for students on the state university level: “The students don’t have books and can’t get them. You end up dictating courses – you read the text

and tell the students what is in it – they have to memorize – they don’t have access to the books” (Remy, 2002).

Actually, I have seen some examples of teaching materials written in Haitian-Creole for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade Haitian students from a public school in Haiti, so Professor Montas’ statement is not entirely correct, or is an exaggeration based on his general impressions. There is a series of reading primers written in Creole for elementary level learners. I have a copy of a Creole-language reading primer called M’ap Li Ak Kè Kontan 4 [I Am Reading With a Happy Heart], which was given to me by a Haitian elementary-school teacher, Mr. Lesly Jean Pierre, from the Ecole Nationale Carius L’Hérison in the Martissant district of Port-au-Prince. He and I discussed the school program in which he teaches, and we have discussed his use of this book as one of the basal reading texts used in the actual public [national] school system in Haiti. On the other hand, all of the other textbooks for all of the other subjects that Mr. Jean Pierre teaches to his 5<sup>th</sup> grade class are written in the French language, so there is an expectation that these content areas are taught or learned or memorized or somehow ‘dealt with’ in a French-language (second-language) context. The Creole basal reader that I have also contains some student-exercises of translation from Creole into French and from French into Creole.

It is noteworthy that Mr. Leslie Jean Pierre exemplifies a high level of personal job satisfaction in his teaching of 5<sup>th</sup> graders at a public [state] elementary school in the heart of a middle-class district in Port-au-Prince. (This class is for those students who could not attend primary school when they were younger. He has students in his 5<sup>th</sup> grade class ranging from 12 or 13 years old to 17 years old. He teaches it in the late afternoons, from 4:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.) He feels that his students are learning a lot, and comprehending



what they learn. Mr. Jean Pierre makes a series of statements on the positive end of the spectrum concerning education in Haiti today:

*“C’est le Ministère de l’Éducation qui a donné le programme scolaire – un programme qui date de 1988 ou 1989 – c’est un bon programme. Je n’ai rien à changer dans ce programme. Dans le temps on faisait un bourrage de crâne, ce que l’on ne fait plus. Le Ministère de l’Éducation a changé le programme – maintenant pendant que l’élève apprend, il a l’aide de l’image. Maintenant on donne des explications. L’élève a compris quelque chose. Il y a seulement une petite partie qu’ils doivent savoir par cœur”* (Leslie Jean Pierre, Ecole National Carius L’Hérison, personal communication, December 26, 2003).

[It’s the Ministry of Education which dictates the school program [curriculum], a curriculum which dates from 1988 or 1989 – it’s a good program. I wouldn’t change anything in this program. In the old days, education was a practice of stuffing brains to the brim; we don’t do that any more. The Ministry changed the program – now while the student learns, he has the help of pictures. Now we give explanations. The student understands things. There is only a small part that the students must know by heart.]

Certain writers and certain Haitian university professors of education or linguistics seem to take a dimmer view of the current situation in Haitian education than that one particular primary-school teacher in the field in Port-au-Prince. “We saw the social classes in Haiti and the culture that was taught in school. This home/school disparity leads to unease, tension, and frustration for the children” (Vernet, 2002).

Indeed, in my own observation notes while in a Haitian school, in a third grade classroom on June 1, 2004, I had written and commented on that mismatch: “The reading text is

called “à La Plage” and is about a young French mother and her two young children during a day of vacation time on the beach. It sounds very like the French Riviera -type experience. It reads very French upper-class, a lady-of-leisure speaking to her nice well-educated children about their pails and shovels and their water-toys and buoys....this text seems totally irrelevant to these Haitian children’s prior experience. This is a lower-middle-class, working-class district, public primary school. These Haitian children are not taken to the beach for leisurely fun outings, swimming, picnicking and sand-castle-building in the French manner. Their parents have neither the time nor the money nor the inclination for this type of excursion.....and the beaches here in Haiti are filthy with trash and raw sewage” (Pichard, observation field notes, 2004).

Professor Vernet had gone on to comment on the educational system, the styles of teaching and learning prevalent in Haiti, and the mismatch to the home culture and Haitian people’s real-life needs. “All the students learn to do in school is to memorize the sentences they are given to memorize. Memorization is very different from knowledge. Language is used, but is not known. The students are not able to really know and practice what they learn at school. The school environment is books, but they have no books at home; books do not relate to their real lives. Memorizing from books or from what they copy in school, that is all they do. They cannot think. [It’s all].... Kids memorizing French sentences...without using logical operations, without understanding” (Vernet, 2002).

The noted Haitian education-reformer and linguistics professor, Yves Dejean, has written extensively on the situation in which Haitian children in Haitian schools are expected to learn content-area subjects.

*“Dans tous les pays indépendants depuis cent ans ou davantage, Haïti est le seul où, en 2001, le système scolaire emploie comme langue d’enseignement une langue non comprise et non parlée par la grande majorité de la population. Les enfants ne peuvent aller à l’école qu’en français, alors que leurs parents et eux-mêmes, ainsi que leurs enseignants, sont tous créolophones et que environ 90% de la population du pays ne comprend ni ne parle le français”* (Dejean, 2001, p.21).

[In all independent countries, for one hundred years or more, Haiti is the only one where, in 2001, the school system employs as a language of instruction a language which is not understood nor spoken by the great majority of the population. Children cannot go to school other than in French, while their parents and themselves, as well as their teachers, are all Creole-speaking, and approximately 90% of the population of the country neither understands nor speaks French.]

Professor Dejean wrote compellingly about the lack of comprehension of the children in Haitian schools, *“La pratique scolaire depuis plus de 140 ans en Haïti est basée sur l’habitude, consciente ou inconsciente, de l’ensemble des enseignants, d’adresser la parole à l’ensemble des élèves de telle sorte qu’ils ne puissent pas comprendre ce qu’on leur dit”* (Dejean , 2001, p.15).

[The scholastic practice for more than 140 years in Haiti is based on the habit, conscious or unconscious, of all of the teachers, to speak to all of the pupils in such a way that they cannot understand what they are told.]

Dejean goes on to discuss the difference between memorizing sentences in French, and true comprehension of their meaning by the pupils in schools in Haiti, *“C’est*

*une grosse illusion de confondre la mémorisation d'un petit vocabulaire scolaire avec sa possession par un écolier créolophone monolingue, urbain ou rural, sommairement 'scolarisé' en français. Faute de compréhension, cette possession n'a jamais existé"* (Dejean, 2001, p. 10).

[It's a grandiose illusion to confuse memorization of a small academic vocabulary with the possession/mastery of the entire French language by a monolingual Creole-speaking pupil, urban or rural, who has been 'educated' in French. Because of the lack of comprehension, the mastery/ possession has never existed.]

One question, emanating from Dejean's comments, which must be asked is, after a year (or several years) of being schooled in Haiti, do Haitian children and youth even **expect** to be able to comprehend what is being said to them in school? What is their expectation about their own level of understanding of the instruction they are given/will be given? What is their expectation concerning the mastery of "academic vocabulary" and its eventual transfer into anything useful or applicable, into real-life language and skills? Having already been schooled in one foreign language, what can their expectations be for their own understanding of the schooling in English (their third language) in America, or what it may lead to for them?

The Haitian sociology professor Remy commented also on the physical conditions of classrooms, comments which apply to all levels of school in Haiti, pre-K through university: "There are basic problems like no electricity and lights. We are using batteries, invertors, generators, like most houses who is [sic] respectable. We barely get two hours of electricity a day. Sometimes we just don't have our classes" (Remy, 2002).

## Haitian Teachers and Working Conditions

Another educational problem in Haiti which has come to light, and about which there has been almost nothing written in the literature, is the fact that very often Haitian primary-level and secondary-level teachers take on more than one teaching contract annually. Because teachers in Haiti are often not employed full-time in any one establishment, as they are in the U.S., they are obliged to fend for themselves (and their families) economically by taking on two or more teaching contracts. They then spend their days racing from school to school in order to “dispense their courses” (they always say that they “dispense” rather than ‘teach’ or ‘give’ their courses in Haiti). If one school is paying a better hourly, daily or monthly rate than another (salaries are frequently offered on a monthly basis, in which so many hours work per month equals a sum of money earned), and there is some overlap in the time-schedule, the teacher will spend most of his/her time teaching at the school which pays more, even if s/he is also simultaneously contracted to another educational institution. Or the teacher may leave one school early (before the official end-time of his class) in order to make it to his/her next place of employment on time; conversely s/he may arrive late to teach his next course somewhere else, if s/he has dispensed his entire class-time in the first school s/he went to that day. So the students in Haiti constantly have less instruction than what is “promised” in the contract between the schools and the families when they register children at educational establishments. In general, students in Haiti, particularly secondary-age students, can be seen waiting in private and public school courtyards several times per day for their various teachers to arrive.....or waiting to see **IF** their

teacher is coming at all that day. Haitian students in Haiti spend an enormous amount of their school day having extra recess time while waiting for their various subject instructors to show up (or not).

Speaking to this situation of mixing (and not necessarily meeting the times of) their various teaching jobs and contracts, which is obviously a financial issue for the teachers and their families to be able to survive, one private-school secondary teacher in the Carrefour working-class district of Port au Prince, Mr. Dieusseul Damus, whom I interviewed twice, had this to say:

*“Du travail à plein temps pour un maître, en Haïti, c’est dans le cadre de l’imaginaire. C’est le système ici qui ne permet pas vraiment ça, le système et le coût de vivre en Haïti. Travailler à plein temps dans l’enseignement ici, c’est imaginaire” (D. Damus personal communication, Port-au-Prince, May 31, 2004).*

[Full-time work for a teacher, in Haiti, this is in the realm of the imaginary. It’s the system here that does not allow that, the system and the cost of living in Haiti. To work full-time in teaching, that is imaginary.]

In any case, secondary students in Haiti do not take each subject listed on their report cards (or school records and transcripts) daily. They take a few periods per week of each subject, ranging from one forty-five-minute period per week, to three or four forty-five-minute periods per week in any given subject.

## Haitian Adolescent Immigrants

So who are these Haitian immigrants? What makes them different from other immigrant groups? If it is true that “The U.S. usually has assumptions of paternalism, tutelage, cultural hegemony, subordination, and a racist way of seeing, in its dealings with Haiti” (Walker, 2002), then what distinguishing elements set these Haitian people apart from other immigrant groups when they immigrate to American shores? “The Haitian diaspora numbers perhaps two million people. By far the largest and most influential group is the Haitian diaspora in North America” (Arthur, 2002, p. 17). Despite the large and growing number of Haitians in this country, they have rarely been studied as a group for secondary-educational purposes. The Haitian-American community has frequently been overlooked, or included in studies of African-Americans. While they are phenotypically black, Haitians are very different from African-Americans in terms of language and culture. As such, Haitians occupy a unique and ambiguous position in United States society in that they are a minority within a minority. “They are distinguished within the black population because of language and cultural differences; and the experiences of Haitians have rarely been represented in the literature” (Moss & Stephenson, 2000, p.113). Colin stated that “Only limited information exists about the meaning of migration for Haitians in general and the Haitian adolescent in particular. The problem to be addressed is our lack of understanding and knowledge about the experience of being a Haitian adolescent living in the U.S. Like all adolescents, these subjects.... were engaged in identity formation; but unlike other adolescents, they

demonstrated ambivalence about their identity in relation to race, language, and pride in national origin” (Colin, 2003, p.3).

While not going so far as to say that Haitians are more resistant to acculturation in American society than any other newcomer group, it would be fair to state with Zephir that “Haitian immigrant ethnicity emerges as a means of survival in a race-defined and racist society in the USA. Sustaining and perpetuating Haitian-Creole language, food, customs, and values is central to the Haitian-American community” (Zephir, 1996, p10). This issue of acculturation becomes more complicated with relation to Haitian immigrants and the children of Haitian immigrants who are socialized in majority American culture and American schools. “Many Haitian children experience considerable prejudice and rejection by the majority culture, as well as their minority peers, because of their linguistic and cultural differences” (Moss & Stephenson, 2000, p.118). This experience causes many adolescents to deny or reject their Haitian culture.

Haitian kids frequently later (some years after immigration) become bicultural, whereas their parents remain monocultural (Haitian) in America. The resiliency mechanisms and coping of Haitian families – as they assimilate into American culture – are sometimes in reaction to symbolic or real oppression, deprivation, degradation, and disenfranchisement. Haitian adolescents are caught between the two systems, and the kids often feel that they are going through this adaptation to a new culture and values alone. It is tempting for them to espouse only the more materialistic values, which they observe in American pop culture as it is represented on television. The traditional Haitian family orientation emphasizes responsibility to group, family and society, with the first value being that of hierarchical authority. The second value is an achievement orientation



(study hard, work hard). In the Haitian family and societal hierarchy, there is a rather rigid expectation of roles, on the authoritarian side, and there is no emphasis or interest in the emotional well-being of youngsters, or on their mental health issues. They are simply expected to obey, to do what they are told without questioning it. Immigrant Haitian parents have various coping strategies during their families' assimilation time, but the Haitian youth perceive these as protective or too-limiting measures. Haitian adolescents growing up in Florida think that their parents 'want them to have a horrible life', and they perceive their parents as 'too controlling' and/or 'too strict'. (I am indebted to Louis HERNANDEZ Marcelin, Brian Page, Sian Evans, Carol E. Kelly, and Louise Myrlande Marcelin of the Family and Community Research Center, University of Miami, for their valuable insights and contributions to my thinking on these matters.)

The combined prejudices of American society and of those within a high school can cause Haitian adolescents to engage in ethnic suicide, to cover up their Haitian origins. Haitians with enough resources live in an environment that more readily permits and encourages expressions of their Haitian culture, therefore middle-class Haitians are more likely to retain pride in their national origins. In the very large, well-established "Little Haiti" Miami community of Haitians, there are all strata of society represented; the community in Miami is multi-generational and multi-layered economically. But the community of Haitian immigrants in Southwest Florida (Collier, Hendry, and Lee counties) is one that is less well-established and less long-term, and it does not yet have the stratification into the wealthier layers of society.

## Assimilation Types and Academic Orientations

It is important to my study, and for my readers, to be cognizant of and familiar with Alex Stepick's seminal writings on the topic of Haitian adolescent immigrants and their acculturation into American society. Therefore as background knowledge for my readers, I find myself obliged to quote from Professor Stepick at some length.

Stepick describes what he calls the segmentary assimilation of Haitian adolescent immigrants: "In contrast, those Haitian adolescents who are residents of an inner city encounter a different America, an overwhelmingly poor black America. When these Haitian immigrants assimilate, when they Americanize, they become not generic, mainstream Americans, but specifically poor African Americans – most vulnerable to American racism. Haitians' assimilation differs from most other immigrants' assimilation only in the version of English they learn. In assimilating to African American culture, some Haitians embody the process of segmentary assimilation, in which immigrants of some minority groups in poor inner cities assimilate into an oppositional culture that demeans academic success" (Stepick, 1998, p.25). Although residents of Fort Myers are not in the "inner city" of Stepick's description, we can also now observe the Haitian youth here going either way – towards academic success or towards oppositional culture, which often translates as hip-hop and rap, gang culture and/or television-inspired pop culture. "Representation is as powerful as reality. Haitian youth are unable to transcend the visuals-as-power view of the world, the visual world, owning expensive brand-names...." (Herns Marcelin, 2003, speech).

“Immigrant and middle-class minority parents encourage students to excel in spite of prejudice and discrimination. Haitian youth in Miami’s poor inner city, for example, are caught in this cultural vise. Their parents insist that their children excel in school as a way to succeed, and that they remain true to their Haitian heritage. Many of the youth’s African American peers demean Haitian culture, and maintain that racism blocks success for all blacks regardless of academic achievement. Through the 1980’s, Haitian parents generally prevailed. While language barriers prevented many from doing well academically, the majority of Haitian youth tried to succeed in school. In the 1990’s, however, more and more Haitian youth rejected their parents’ wishes” (Stepick, 1998, p.27).

“Haitian youth are increasingly divided into two types: those who maintain an immigrant, positive academic cultural orientation, and those who assimilate to African American inner-city culture and adopt an adversarial academic orientation. A Haitian cultural identity and high academic accomplishment are more likely among those who were born in Haiti. Boys are more apt to adopt a monocultural, either-or position” (Stepick, 1998, p.28).

Although I can neither entirely endorse nor entirely reject Stepick’s statements relating Haitian cultural identity and high academic accomplishment, my observations about the high school research population with which I work lead me to conclude that locally in Southwest Florida there is a high degree of cultural identity pride as young Haitians, very particularly among the male adolescents. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the teenage boys speak and/or write of their own Haitianness every day – and in

consistently positive, even to be construed as ‘boastful’, terms. “Haitian Forever”, “Haitian Pride”, “Haitian Boy”, and “Haitian the Greatest” are typical daily slogans in this population. The males reinforce their own and other males’ Haitian identity on a daily, even on an hourly basis through conversations (in Creole) specifically referring to it (“Haitian-ness”, Haitian pride, saying that a boy is being more -- or less -- Haitian through such and such behavior, speech, acquisitions, attitudes, etc.). In Social-Cognitive Theory terms, Bandura said that, “The observer is likely to attend to the behavior of a prestigious model. Cues such as general appearance, speech, style, age, and signs of expertise are interpreted as indicators of past successes” (Bandura, 1986, p.208). The problem here is whether or not the immigrant Haitian secondary student also maintains a goal of high academic accomplishment while imitating his ‘prestigious-looking’ peers.

The female Haitian teens seem to be more subtle in their cultural identification, or less willing to label themselves publicly as Haitian, and they do not engage in ‘prideful’ statements about their national origins with anywhere near the frequency as the boys. They seem less conflicted about a positive academic cultural orientation and the types of behaviors that reflect their images and goal of being successful. With very few exceptions over the years, I have observed the female Haitian adolescent immigrant students to maintain goals of high academic accomplishment, goals which they continue to socialize and encourage amongst themselves through their verbalizations about doing their academic assignments, getting good grades, maintaining their GPA’s, obtaining a diploma, passing the FCAT exam, etc.

## Methodology

The interplay and impacts of these various domains of study (linguistic, social, cultural, phenomenological, educational), and their interrelationships with Haitian adolescents' academic endeavors, cannot be ignored when one explores questions surrounding the academic success of Haitian immigrant youth in Florida. Even if the assumption is made that we, as educators, can define what "success" means to Haitian adolescent immigrants, there is no reason to suppose that with our added understandings, we can or should reconcile their perceptions of success with the American mainstream culture's. This study is meant to be exploratory, not prescriptive.

This is a qualitative study, theoretically grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive theory, which examined adolescent Haitian immigrant students' academic performance in a public high school in Florida, and the factors involved in their self-perceptions of academic learning and success, and their thoughts and perceptions about academic learning and success. The data sources are from: a) audio-taped focus group interviews with 36 students; b) written responses to focus-questions by 19 individual Haitian students; c) classroom writings by 19 Haitian students in response to specific writing-prompts; d) anecdotal records from notes and folders; and e) 19 focus-group students' May 2005 report cards grades, records of cumulative Grade Point Averages, Florida Comprehension Assessment Test (Reading) scores, numbers of high-school credits earned, and diploma or graduation status (where applicable).

An exploratory qualitative method was used, beginning with 2 focus group interviews of a total of thirty-six Haitian immigrant adolescent students, who have

immigrated to the USA within the last five years. (See Appendix A for focus questions.) There was a Creole-speaking interpreter present. Individual interviews using the same focus questions were also conducted with nineteen Haitian immigrant students, again with the interpreter present. Those nineteen students wrote their answers to the focus questions. The focus group interviews, along with the written answers to the questions of the 19 individual students, gave a general overview of what these Haitian adolescent students say when addressing the tension among these questions regarding their own academic success. The more measurable, reality-based data sources (report cards, FCAT scores, GPA's, credits earned, diplomas) contribute not only the current Florida-public-high-school frame of reference -based way of assessing a student's relative academic success, but also a way to gauge the extent of the mismatch between a student's perceptions of his own success and the current "reality" of his or her academic situation.

In the focus group interviews and the individual interviews, emerging connections, emerging patterns, emerging categories of concern and emerging themes were sought. These indicators were later coded into 13 themes and related to the review of existing literature. The key phrases, types of responses and categories of responses from the Haitian adolescent students formed patterns of attitudes and perceptions (13 themes) leading to a greater awareness of their academic experiences and consequent feelings of success (or failure) in a public high school in Florida. These thirteen themes were then divided up or inserted into the categories created by the five guiding research questions.

The classroom writings by the students, and anecdotal records of conversations and incidents in the classroom, were based on work with reading, discussing, and writing: literature-based writing-prompts or extension-to-real-life writing-prompts drawn from

and/or inspired by the 11<sup>th</sup> grade and 12<sup>th</sup> grade ESOL English Language Arts and ESOL Intensive Reading curricula. Naturally, certain works of literature are imposed during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade high school English Language Arts academic year; however, it is possible for a teacher-researcher to design writing-prompts around the area of ‘success’ within all of these. These anecdotal records and classroom writing-prompts led to the development of themes 11, 12 and 13 in the body of the study.

Using an open coding process (Cresswell, 2002), the focus group data, the interview data, and the textual data were reduced to 13 themes (or salient categories) related to the range of responses that the Haitian students expressed regarding their own issues concerning success. These 13 themes were determined by dividing the texts into segments, coding these segments, searching for and reducing redundancy in the codes, and finally collapsing the codes into themes or patterns that describe how Haitian students consider these tensions. These themes fit into categories created by the five guiding questions of my study.

The focus group interview results along with the written-responses textual results were used to generalize findings regarding these questions of academic success in Haitian adolescent immigrant students in a mid-size Florida town.

“A qualitative methodology was chosen as the most valid and meaningful approach. Researchers have become increasingly aware of the dangers inherent in applying theoretical constructs and quantitative instruments to culturally diverse populations for whom these have not been developed or normed. Before existing instruments can be confidently applied, the phenomena must be studied from an

in-depth exploration of individuals' experiences" (Moss & Stephenson, 1999, p.113).

It is the goal of this study to investigate their perceptions and beliefs about certain questions concerning success, measures of success, and successful behaviors, for the adolescent Haitian recent-immigrant student-participants, not to compare their experiences to another group, such as African-American or Hispanic minority groups, Latin American/Central American immigrants, Asian immigrants, or European-American immigrants. This is not a comparison study to other immigrant, ethnic, racial or minority groups of secondary students in SW Florida. A certain specific group of Haitian teenagers were asked to talk and write about their perceptions of, and beliefs about, the concept of success and how they think they can attain it in their Florida high school.

### Assumptions and Limitations

The major assumption of this study is that the concerns of Haitian adolescent immigrants who have recently (within the past five years) settled in Southwest Florida and attend a public high school with a student population of about 2000 students in Fort Myers, Florida, may mirror the concerns of Haitian adolescent immigrant students settling and attending secondary schools elsewhere in the United States, particularly in mid-size towns. The assumption is that this is a phenomenological and ethnographic study of the academic and success-related concerns of this particular group of youth in one Southwest Florida public high school. Fort Myers has a growing Haitian community,



numbering about 16,000 persons. But it is not equal in size to the Haitian communities of Miami, New York and Boston. In the latter three cities, there are very probably more support systems in place for Haitian youth to find community or church-based services to meet their needs and address their concerns. The greater Fort Myers Haitian community, however, may be reaching a critical mass, where there are just enough students in the public school system, patients in the health-care system, inhabitants requiring apartments, water, electricity, telephones, gas and other city/county services, congregants attending churches, and people requiring the services of various professionals (doctors, midwives, engineers, lawyers, accountants, etc.) for this Haitian population and the systems that serve them to be confronted by societal, cultural, educational, and communication challenges.

One limitation of the study is the selection of the students for the focus groups, the personal interviews and the writing-samples data. These are not only Haitian-born males and females between the ages of 16 and 20 who arrived from one day to five years ago in the USA, but they are all living in Southwest Florida, they all attend the same public high school now, and they all, furthermore, due to their status as Limited English Proficient or Language Enriched Pupils (LEP), attend one of 5 different English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes that this teacher-researcher conducts daily. One important fact is that these students were all members of the Haitian-American Students' Club, which held its meetings after school, at the time of this study. This is important because the actual focus-group interviewing and individual written-answers interviewing of these Haitian students was not done during English-class time.

Another limitation of this study is that there may not be much generalizability from it, to other Haitian adolescent immigrant students acting in schools in other places. Although I hope to add to the body of knowledge through this exploratory ethnography, and the influences upon ‘other Haitian adolescent students immigrating from Haiti’ (particularly students of working-class Haitian parents) are more or less the same as for my students, the perceptions of ‘other Haitian students’, or the impacts of their perceptions on their behaviors, may well be different. There are too many factors: influences from Haiti, impacts on specific students, perceptions of specific students, and behaviors of specific students, for this study to be totally generalized to Haitian adolescent immigrant students in another city.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### Introduction

According to the framework of Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), learning occurs in the naturalistic, social milieu, and any behavior of the learner is influenced by his/her perceptions of others' behaviors, and beliefs in their relative success. Whereas the true complexities of the influences on Haitian students are beyond the scope of this study, and it would be presumptuous to say that I could cover all the influences in one dissertation, there are an unusually large number of domains to be reviewed, and it is necessary that a modicum of understanding be attained about all of them, when one is writing about Haitian adolescent immigrants' educational issues in present-day America. The topic of "perceptions of success" is so intertwined and convoluted in and with Haiti's history, economics, politics, society, class issues, color issues, linguistics, immigration and assimilation issues, minorities and underachievement, sociological issues, and educational and literacy issues of the Haitian people, that it is necessary to spend a bit of time reviewing all of these to see where and how they apply to my topic. Each section of the literature review contains an impact or an influence on Haitian adolescent students, and each of these in turn influences the perceptions of the Haitian students. According to Social Cognitive Theory, their perceptions influence, change, or affect their behaviors. I begin by reviewing Social Cognitive Theory precepts, since this is the lens through which we view the rest, and then I make a bridge to the

various influences on Haitian teenagers' perceptions and beliefs about success-related concepts.

### Bandura's Social-Cognitive Learning Theory

“The insight into the dialectic between social reality and individual existence in history is by no means new. The sociology of knowledge understands human reality as socially constructed reality” (Berger & Lockmann, 1966, p. 189).

This quote from Berger and Lockmann pre-dates Albert Bandura's work “Social foundations of thought and action: A social-cognitive theory” (1986) by 20 years. Yet it lays down the essential terms of the theory: that human reality (the terms by which we act) is socially constructed. The idea is that we observe what we do observe in social settings, draw our own conclusions about what we've observed -- its success or failure -- in others, and act upon the model accordingly for our own ends. Bandura identified the role of behavioral models in the learning of prosocial behaviors, antisocial behaviors, and the modification of our own behaviors. His theory identified several social and cognitive factors that influence learning. All people have the capability of using symbols and engaging in intentional, purposive actions. Bandura also included in the theory, the influences of the media on the values, attitudes, and behavior styles of the observers (Bandura, 1986).

Although since the 1980's, the concepts of perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1992, Pajares, 1997, and Pajares & Schunk, 2001) and self-regulated learning (Locke & Latham, 1990, and Pintrich & De Groot, 1990) have become a major focus, Bandura's

social-cognitive theory explains learning in the naturalistic setting. “The social milieu provides numerous opportunities for individuals to acquire complex skills and abilities through the observations of modeled behaviors and their behavioral consequences” (Gredler, 2001, p. 316). The social-cognitive theory addresses the nature of the learning process, and situates it in the social, natural milieu; and the outcomes of learning. This theory makes the assumptions that the learner can abstract a range of information from observing the behavior of others, and make decisions about which behaviors to adopt and enact.

The acquisition of complex behaviors is not explained by a simple relationship between the environment and the individual. Instead, most environmental influences on behavior are mediated by a variety of internal, personal factors. In Bandura’s (1986) view, there is a three-way relationship, called reciprocal determinism, among three factors: the environment, behavior, and internal events that influence perceptions and actions. The relationships between and among the environment, the internal events of a personality, and the behaviors of a person are often complex and subtle. Certain personal attributes, such as sex or race or skin-color, often activate different social treatment. The individual’s self-conception, in turn, is influenced by the treatment that s/he receives, such that his/her biases are either altered or maintained. In different people, and for different actions, cognitive factors or emotional factors (internal events) may gain the upper hand in regulating the individual’s perception and his/her next behaviors to be enacted after perception.

Bandura regarded learning and performance as two separate events. He did not stipulate that performance had to occur to prove that learning had in fact occurred.

Bandura believes that individuals acquire internal codes of behavior that may or may not be performed later (Bandura, 1986). Visual codes of events/behaviors consist of abstractions of the distinctive features of events, instead of mental copies. Included are activities, places, and objects. Verbal codes include language symbols, numbers, musical notations, and others. The importance of visual codes, both visual and verbal, is that they include a great deal of information in an easily stored form in a person's memory (Bandura, 1977).

There are three key elements in Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory. First, the learning process requires both the cognitive processing and decision-making skills of the learner. Second, learning is a three-way process (interlocking relationship) between the environment, personal factors, and behavior. Third, learning results in the acquisition of verbal and visual codes of behavior that may or may not later be performed. In the natural or social setting, individuals learn new behaviors through the observation of models and through the effects of their own behaviors/actions.

According to Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, learning proceeds as follows in the social milieu: 1) There is a behavioral model to be observed; 2) The observer observes the consequences of the modeled behavior; 3) the learner has internal processes; and 4) the learner has perceived self-efficacy. Key issues are the effects of the models, the types of modeling stimuli, the model's characteristics, and the characteristics of the observers. One example would be how Haitian male adolescent immigrants in Florida often turn to drug-trafficking as a way to make quick money. They have observed other Haitian youth engaged in the drug trade on the streets. They have observed the drug-dealer role-model having plenty of ready money to spend on an array of desirable goods

and services, such as expensive shoes, jewelry, cars, electronics, girlfriends, etc. They have further observed the model “not getting caught” by the police. The newcomer engages in cognitive processes and decides, or is drawn into, the drug trade or drug-running as a way to apparently make easy money and have what material goods he desires faster. The pull of academic learning seems less and less interesting and relevant, compared to the lure of ‘big money’ on the streets. The original drug-dealing Haitian role-models are not deterred often enough or swiftly enough by the justice system to make an impact on the newcomer’s judgment of the desirability or impact for himself of this situation. The fictive Haitian newcomer becomes another drug-trafficking high-school-dropout within a few years of life in Florida.

The primary function of the modeled behavior is to transmit information to the observer. Modeled behavior may serve as a social prompt to initiate similar behavior in others. The learner’s existing restraints against the performance of particular behaviors may be strengthened or weakened. Modeling behaviors influences others by providing new patterns of behavior. According to Gredler, “Models are particularly important in the socialization process of both children and adults. Language, mores, familial customs, as well as educational, social, and political practices are modeled in countless situations” (Gredler, 2001, p. 318). An important factor in the learning process is the degree to which the model is attended to by the learner. Some models, such as regular associates and peers, are more effective than others in attracting the learner’s attention. (In the above example of this social learning process, from the eyes of a Haitian male youth, who will he attend to more, his high school teacher’s model or the model of the drug-trafficking Haitian male with plenty of money?)

“Responsiveness to models is influenced by three situational characteristics” (Bandura, 1986, p.207). One is the particular attributes or characteristics of the model. Important model characteristics are relevance and credibility for the observers. Models who have an impact on observers may be prestigious, appear to deserve trust, portray consensus in a group, offer believable standards to guide observers’ aspirations, or provide realistic reference figures for observer comparison (Rosenthal and Bandura, 1978, p. 636). Observing success on school tasks achieved by those who are similar in age and competence should enhance the likelihood of observational learning. (Observing lack of success on school tasks by ‘same’ should achieve ‘same’ – observing lack of success on Reading FCAT after repeated tries should enhance the Haitian learner’s belief in the probability of ‘same result for myself’.)

Another factor that influences responsiveness to a model is uncertainty about a particular course of action. “In such situations, the observer is likely to attend to the behavior of a prestigious model. Cues such as general appearance, speech, style, age, and signs of expertise are interpreted as indicators of past successes” (Bandura, 1986, p. 208). These characteristics exert the greatest influence when the consequences of the modeled action are unknown (Bandura, 1986). The third stimulus characteristic that influences learning is the degree of intrinsic reward already present in the situation.

In addition to situational and role-model characteristics, the nature of the observer also affects responsiveness to modeling influences (Bandura, 1986). Research indicates that those who lack self-confidence and have low self-esteem are especially prone to adopt the behavior of successful (or successful-looking) models. Such characteristics in part explain the tendencies of teenagers to emulate the dress and styles of popular music



stars, actors, etc. Two principal types of models are live and symbolic. Live models are family members, teachers, friends, work associates, and others in the immediate social setting. Symbolic models are pictorial examples of behavior, such as figures in the mass media. “However, media often present fictional views of the world. Thus, the observer may obtain distorted views of various settings” (Gredler, 2001, p. 320).

Social Cognitive Theory includes three types of consequences for behavior: direct consequences, vicarious consequences, and self-imposed consequences. Vicarious consequences are associated with the observed behaviors and results of others. That is, a model receives reinforcement or punishment for a particular behavior, and the consequence to the model generates emotional effects in the observer. Vicarious reinforcement also conveys information to the observer about which behaviors are appropriate in which settings. The observer anticipates the same reinforcement consequences for enactment of the same or similar behaviors. The model’s continued reinforcement for a behavior predicts success for the observer; such behaviors are described as having acquired functional value (Bandura, 1977).

Self-reinforcement of behaviors is independent of the consequences delivered by society. Self-reinforcement involves three elements: a) a self-prescribed standard of behavior; b) reinforcing events under the control of the individual; and c) the individual as his or her own reinforcing agent. Individuals establish performance standards for themselves and tend to respond to their own behavior in self-rewarding ways if their performance matches or exceeds the standard they have set for themselves. Similarly, they respond in self-criticizing ways if their performance fails to meet the standard (Gredler, 2001).

In social-cognitive theory, cognitive processes play a central role in learning. The learner's ability to code and store transitory experiences in symbolic form and to represent future consequences in thought are essential to the acquisition and modification of human behavior. The cognitive processing of events and potential consequences guide the learner's behavior. Characteristics of the behaviors that influence attention include complexity and relevance. Relevance refers to the importance of the behavior to the observer/learner. Learning from models also depends on the observer's skill in monitoring and interpreting ongoing events.

The construct labeled self-efficacy refers to beliefs about one's capabilities, and these beliefs also influence and motivate learners. Perceived self-efficacy refers to a belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the actions necessary to manage particular situations (Bouffard-Bouchard, 1990 and Bandura, 1999). Self-efficacy differs from self-concept in that self-concept is a general assessment that includes several self-reactions. Self-efficacy is a content-related judgment, and in the academic sphere, it refers to the belief that one can perform particular academic tasks successfully (Pajares & Schunk, 2001, and Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Faulty self-appraisal can lead to high self-efficacy that may be inaccurate (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Four types of influence contribute to individuals' beliefs about their personal efficacy (Bandura, 1986): mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological/emotional states.

Those with high self-efficacy construct success scenarios. Efficacy beliefs enhance or limit motivation by influencing the types of goals that individuals set for themselves, the extent of effort that they expend, and their persistence in the face of difficulties. Self-efficacy is dynamic. Separating individuals' assessments of their basic competencies

from assessments of their beliefs about situations (or beliefs about success) is a problematic measurement issue.

In summary of Bandura's Social-Cognitive Theory, the self-regulatory system consists of informational cognitive structures on goals, outcomes, and behavior, and cognitive processes that perceive, evaluate, and regulate behavior. Learners' cognitive processes and decision-making are important factors in learning. Learners' perceptions of environmental cues contribute to their eventual learning and enactment of behaviors. The perceptions of Haitian adolescent immigrant students are impacted and affected by many factors present in their society, culture, linguistic functioning, and educational backgrounds. The following sections of Chapter Two review some of the more important impacts on Haitian immigrant youth arriving in Florida (U.S.) schools.

### Review of the History, Politics, and Economics of Haiti

Located in the Caribbean Sea in the Antilles portion on the Western third of the island of Hispaniola, which Haiti shares with the Dominican Republic, many of the vast mountain ranges which traverse the country remain completely uninhabitable, as the country suffers chronic drought and severe flooding caused in part by thoughtless deforestation. Haiti is roughly the size of the state of Maryland, and its population is about 8 million people. "Haiti has a young population, with nearly 60% below 25 years of age"(United Haitians Home Page, 2002, p.1). The life expectancy in Haiti is variously estimated at 52 through 56 years old, depending on sources. Haiti is distinctive in this hemisphere. "It is the only Latin American nation of French (French-based Creole)

language and culture, just as it is the only one of overwhelmingly African racial background” (Wesson, 1984, p.vii). Haiti’s population is growing in size at an alarming rate, formerly mostly rural in nature, but with a demographic shift occurring in the last 25 years towards steeply rising numbers of people living in urban environments, particularly the migration to the capital city, Port au Prince. Its economy is marked by “agricultural over-exploitation and export-driven colonialist economies, a brief flurry of manufacturing for the US market, and a long decline. There is fishing and mining, tourism and the urban economy” (Arthur, 2002, p.1). Without jobs, the majority of the urban population gets involved in small commerce and marketing, or criminal activity – which is on an unfettered rise in the capital city. “What the population does understand, and what they live, are the catastrophic statistics that are published by the media: 82% of the 8 million Haitians live below the poverty level, 52.9% of the people are illiterate, life expectancy is only 51.7 years, the current rate of infant mortality is 74.38 per thousand live births, and 5.6% of the people are HIV positive” (Peschanski, 2005, p.2). At the base of the hills of Port au Prince, the sewers are all open and exposed (in the countryside there are no sewers or sanitation systems). There is no electricity for many hours every day (but in the countryside there is none whatsoever.) The lack of potable water throughout the country is one of the main causes of disease and infant mortality.

In Haiti’s economy today, we can also factor in that there is a presence of troops and advisors from the United Nations (in the form of the temporary UN force with the acronym of MINUSTAH), there is a temporary U.S.-sponsored transitional government, and there are many human rights groups, non-governmental organizations (NGO’s), missionaries, relief workers, and a growing influence of the international drug trade.

Haitian women frequently operate small businesses in the streets or from their homes as “ti machann” [small vendors], selling their wares of candy, fruit and vegetables, cheap mass-produced objects such as sunglasses or underwear from Taiwan, homemade cakes/pastry, sodas, ice creams, etc. Most urban and rural Haitians are more comfortable with an informal economy than any with more formal trappings such as official (state or governmental) permits, state or administrative rules and regulations, etc.; and anecdotally, Haitians of all classes and professions engage without embarrassment in some degree of buying and selling for profit. Bribery and corruption are extremely widespread, permeating almost every transaction and operation, large or small, important or insignificant. According to the Global Corruption Perceptions Index released on October 20, 2004 by Transparency International of London, Haiti was considered the most corrupt nation, surpassing even the corruption scores of Bangladesh or Nigeria (Transparency International, 2004). The Haitian diaspora (Haitians living and working abroad in such countries as the USA, Canada, France, and French territories such as French Guyana and the islands of Martinique or St. Martin) has a deep influence on the economy and society of Haiti.

There is no one history of Haiti, because like any country, it is and it has a ‘story’ with interpretations. This ‘story’ (or history) could be thought of as explaining the reasons leading up to the current political economy, which political economy itself partially explains why there are so many Haitian students in Florida (and elsewhere in the Haitian-diaspora host-countries). Haiti, a former French colony until its war of independence (1791-1804), has a history of political instability since declaring its independence in 1804 after a revolt by a half-million black slaves (see Arthur & Dash,

1999; Farmer, 2003; Fatton, 2002; Heintz & Heintz, 1996; Joseph, 1984 and 1997; Lawless, 1992; Nicholls, 1996; Rotberg, 1971; and Wilentz, 1989). Haiti and the United States have had a long, complicated, divisive relationship, and many Haitian people today blame the United States (or in combination with other superpowers) for the ills of the Haitian economy, government, and society. "Haiti's misfortune was to have a state and mercantile elite that was strong enough to exploit the small farmers, but too ineffective to develop the country. The indigenous elite has presided over the country's immiseration along with foreign powers" (Blackburn, 2004, p.2). The rift between Haiti's elite and the rest of her people is just as wide and deep as ever, in 2005. Further, the elite / wealthy class members (particularly businessmen) are perceived by the rest of the Haitian people as being collaborators with the superpower countries' governments in their current political/economic control of Haiti, creating even more resentment and separation.

The relations between Haiti and the USA have been marked by (white racist) fears and loathing, and colonial or paternalistic hegemony and/or condescension, on governmental, societal, establishment, and individual/personal bases. The Haitian revolution is rarely given its due in the chain of human-rights revolutions occurring around the globe. The fact that only in Haiti were ALL citizens given their full rights back in 1804 is frequently ignored, and the victory of the former slaves of Haiti over their French colonizers "has been a Pyrrhic one. The Haitians would never heal the wounds of colonialism, racism, and inequality" (Farmer, 2003, p. 63). Haitians' bitterness and righteous anger about their 1825 debt to France, which had a devastating effect on their economy ever since the Haitian government of 1825 agreed to pay reparations to France

for the “crime of liberating itself from French tyranny and plunder” (Chomsky, 2004, p.1) for their ‘lost slaves and lost holdings’ continues to this day.

Haitian history has been uniquely tragic. Under Spain in the seventeenth century and France in the eighteenth, Haiti was the world’s richest colony, a lush producer of sugar, molasses, coffee, cotton and indigo. The great revolution of the 1790’s brought independence, but it also put an end to prosperity. Today, there are complex problems and contradictions in Haiti’s political economy, and its society’s ‘democratization’ has severe limitations. Most Haitian people in Haiti live in poverty, fear, hunger and disease. Repression, punctuated with occasional periods of liberalization, has sustained a social order in which an estimated 75 percent of the population live on the edge of starvation (Latin America Bureau, 1985). Once a source of plunder for the French colonial power, the Haitian national political economy has since been a source of personal enrichment for a series of rapacious rulers. “It is a system of licensed exploitation, much closer kin to gangsterism than to constitutional democracy” (Wesson, 1984, p. vii). The successive governments of Haiti have been “much better at extraction of economic surplus from the people than in providing even minimal services such as roads, credit, schools, hospitals, running water, and sanitation services” (Weinstein and Segal, 1984, p. 3). Written by a Haiti scholar over 30 years ago, the words are still true that government after government “maintains the rhetoric and trappings of parliamentary democracy, while blatantly and with impunity flouting the constraints of constitution and custom” (Rotberg, 1971, p.17). In government after government, in Haiti, there is “a political regime in which those who hold office or political power live(d) off politics. In addition to their regular salaries, these officials received perquisites of office either as bribes or by siphoning (i.e.,

stealing) public monies from the various government agencies or state enterprises for private ends. The objective of those who control predatory states is simply to plunder resources” (Dupuy, 1997, p. 21). Unfortunately, the post-Duvalier-dictatorships period, far from seeing a restoration of civilian-led democracy, has been a period of increasingly divisive and unbridled violence and economic decline, the “growing disjuncture between state and nation, the contradictory relationship between state and civil society” (Trouillot, 1990, p.22). There is no infrastructure, and no due process. Most Haitian people today say that times and conditions in their country have never been worse, and that they don’t know what to do for themselves or their children to stay alive and be free from violence.

Most recently, Haiti, now the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, has depended on the United Nations, U.S. and foreign troops for security since President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was forced from power during a February 2004 rebellion. After 200 years of misrule, the prevailing opinion in most countries is that Haiti is currently a completely failed state, akin to that of Somalia in Eastern Africa. To spotlight the depths to which recent governmental incompetence, corruption, factionalism, gang wars, anarchy and violence have sunk Haiti, in the fall of 2004 a notion was advanced that Haiti should perhaps become a United Nations Protectorate. This idea of Haiti becoming a Protectorate has not so far become reality, although one wonders how much more the poverty-ridden and victimized Haitian people can stand. Balanced against the pride of the Haitian people in being a free and independent nation for 201 years are the very concepts of survival and stabilization in a country with chronic widespread starvation and disease, with an unemployment rate of somewhere between 70% and 80% among able adults.



On the other hand, it is widely held that Haiti, despite profound poverty, chaos and political instability, has retained its vibrant cultural life and singular identity through its Vodou and other religions, its painting and art, its food, the Haitian-Creole language, literature in both Creole and French, and a thriving oral culture. Anecdotally, in my twenty-three years in the domain of education of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), I have never seen any other group of adolescent immigrants cling so fiercely and willingly to their own culture and home country/ home language / home customs. These young males and females speak of Haiti or their own Haitianness, their ethnic pride, their language, their culture and food habits, and their youthful understandings of their home country's politics, every single day in school; many of these youth speak daily of these subjects for years and years after their own departure from the country. Their home culture and heritage are and remain extremely compelling to these adolescent and young-adult Haitians, well after the time that most other immigrant youth have moved into a "full acculturation to America" mode of life and speech.

### Haitian Society: Class and Color Issues

One of the principal preoccupations of Haitians is the issue of identity. As a population in economic and political exile, confronted by enormous problems in the USA, it is little wonder that they experience conflicts over the nature of the identity they wish to project. Notwithstanding the other influences from other countries (particularly the meddling by superpowers resulting in negative consequences to Haiti's political economy and society), the lasting after-effects of colonialism have created a caste-like

class system, with racist and color issues which are now endemic and proper to Haitian society. In general, Haitians of all social classes have tended to 'accept' the ranking of whiteness and colonially-derived cultural behavior and language as superior to blackness and the African-based cultural and linguistic forms. ('Color' refers to a position on a continuum of racial mixture between European and African, and not merely to one's color of skin. Determination of position on such a continuum depends on the evaluation of hair form and facial features also.) The discriminatory class system practiced by Haitians against one another may well cause (or add to) the implosion of the society, since it seems apparent at the present time that Haitians cannot work together successfully across their current (and traditional) class and color lines. I am sensitive to the fact that even that latter statement of mine, of course, can be held to have been influenced by the prevailing North American-influenced, white/racist-influenced media statements and some of the literature concerning the state of affairs in Haiti or among Haitians. Even though I am aware of the subtly racist, paternalistic or hegemonic tendencies constantly present in the media and in scholars' writings concerning Haiti and Haitians, it is difficult for me to fight against these, to resist them and to remain wary or critical of them in my own writing. However, it seems fair to say, "While consciousness of racial identity has been a powerful factor which, from the earliest days, has united Haitians in a determination to preserve their national independence, color has been a divisive factor, leading to an erosion of the stability of that independence" (Nicholls, 1996, p.3). Although to an outsider, it may seem futile and self-destructive for Haitian immigrants to identify with the traditional class and status systems in Haiti, they often continue to subtly perpetuate these divisions among themselves.

Numerous scholars in the last century have been studying and writing about racism, color issues, black identity problems, etc. As Frantz Fanon wrote, “The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European’s feeling of superiority. It is the racist who creates his inferior” (Fanon, 1967, p.93). Although Haiti has been independent since 1804, there still exists an “embedded colonial education” (Lumumba, 2004, p.1) which affects the Haitian people subtly, constantly and profoundly.

There are many general references and scholarly works which discuss Haiti’s traditional (and current) culture, class and color system(s). Haitian society is generally considered to be divided into the elite, the bourgeoisie, the middle class, and the poor masses (both urban and peasant/rural) – but the divisions are based on a complicated system of skin color, other physical traits, family, educational level, economics (both actual and potential), and perceived class (see Buchanan, 1983; Charles, 1992; Dash, 2001; Dayan, 2004; Dayan, 1995; Dupuy, 2004; Herskovits, 1937 & 1971; Johnson, 2004; Simpson, 1941; Stepick, 1998; Trouillot, 1990; and Wingfield & Parenton, 1965). From the sea of social commentary, scholarly writings, and learned discussion of Haitian societal structure/class/color issues, the most striking perception overall to me is that almost nothing has changed in Haitian society – particularly regarding Haitians’ own class consciousness - since the earliest descriptions (by the 1937, 1941, 1965 and 1983 authors). I base my comment that “almost nothing has changed” on my interviews and conversations in Haiti and in the USA, over the past three years or more, with Haitian adults and teenagers of all social and educational strata.

“The mutual dependence between social stratification and everything else in Haiti” (Simpson, 1941, p.3) which was observed by Simpson in 1941 still holds true today.

The fundamental key to an understanding of the Haitian social structure is its class system, as no other social institution is as basic. The colonial stratification pattern set the stage from which subsequently evolved the present-day Haitian class system. The class structure divides the society roughly into two social groups, the 'haves' and 'have nots', and permeates all other social institutions such as the family, marriage, economy, religion, politics, education, folkways, and value system. "A color or physical progression of de-Africanization occurs as one moves up the strata from the black peasant masses to the urban mulatto bourgeoisie or elite" (Wingfield & Parenton, 1965, p.25). Contemporary Haitian society is stratified in the following way: at the top, there is an urban, predominantly mulatto, traditional bourgeoisie representing no more than 2% of the population, followed by an emerging middle class which represents anywhere from 4% to 10% of the population, an urban proletariat (the urban poor) which makes up another 6% to 10%, and the remaining 78% to 88% makes up the peasant mass.

Fundamentally, the main features of the Haitian class structure have not changed since its origin. The same percentage, 78% to 88%, of the population still remains at the bottom of the social pyramid as a peasant mass, first as slaves and now as free men. The top of the pyramid was occupied in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by a small French colonial minority, who were displaced at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by a small mulatto minority, and now the mulatto elite is being slowly challenged in turn by a rising "brown" middle class. The more privileged group would include the two urban classes, the bourgeoisie and the middle class, which represent together about 6% to 12% of the population. While social distance between the bourgeoisie and the middle class is quite manifest, it does not

compare with the social gulf separating these two strata from the poor urban and rural masses.

The bourgeoisie and the middle class represent the enlightened segment of the population. They are more world-oriented, they possess education and command of the French language; they are aware of what is going on in their country in the sense that they can comprehend and appraise the complex political situation, can be influenced by reason and arguments, and are articulate in expressing their wants, dissatisfactions, and aspirations. The members of this more privileged group divide among themselves the power, wealth and prestige existing in Haiti.

The other segment of society is the underprivileged, inarticulate and poverty-stricken mass. The peasant mass and the urban proletariat make up together 78% to 88% of the population. They are overwhelmingly illiterate, they do not understand French, they are superstitious, and of course have very little political power. They have a subsistence economy – their main concern is how to eke out a daily hand-to-mouth existence.

There is a power struggle among the ‘haves’, between the bourgeoisie (traditional elite who are for the most part descendants of the free mulattoes of the colonial period), and the rising and increasingly educated, increasingly professional middle class. The proportion of elite has been steadily decreasing because of their relatively lower birth rate and their increasing migration out of the country. This class stratum has maintained its prestige position and lighter skin color by endogamy and interlocking family ties. Marriages with Haitians of other classes seldom occur, and if they do, it is generally the female of the upper class marrying a prominent male of the middle class. Since the

question of color plays an important part in mate selection, there would not be a wide color disparity in marriages across class lines. Class solidarity is the most outstanding trait of the bourgeoisie. They are exclusively urban and almost all clustered in the capital city, Port au Prince, and its hilltop suburb, Pétionville. It is difficult to compare their style of life to that of the elite of other countries. In manners, savoir faire, art of conversation, entertaining, and handling of servants, they have the sophistication of the European elite, but their material comforts and conveniences often compare to lower-middle-class Americans. Their style of life is pleasant and leisurely, and has an archaic French colonial flavor.

The members of this elite class are found in the professional, managerial and administrative occupations. They have lost their dominance in government posts to the new middle class. There has been a gradual erosion of the political power of the bourgeoisie. The Haitian middle/working and lower classes are now more aware of and critical of the elite class tendencies towards insularity, color/social discrimination, and attempts at political domination. "Haiti's upper classes, including the small but intensely ambitious middle class, are so ingrained in this doctrine of superiority that they can't even see that how they treat the majority class is the least bit wrong or harmful in any way. The upper classes still exist to destroy all that makes Haiti special. Their disdain and disgust for the masses will preclude them from making Haiti a great country, as it could be. They live to celebrate themselves" (Dorce, 2004, p.1).

Lumumba says that "[we do not have]...a true conviction of being a liberated black nation. We still practice the 'house nigger' mentality, protecting the good old white racist system. We live out our lives depending on what the white man says and when he

says it. When the white media talk about an issue, most of us Haitians give more credence to them because the information comes from a white institution. We've been programmed to want to look like the white man and think like the white man. We see mental and physical violence against each other among the Haitian family. I have seen this double standard way of life, even within life in a Haitian family. If a Haitian marries a white person, or a person who is not Haitian, we praise and kiss up to that person. However, when a Haitian marries a Haitian, we tend to bring all kinds of nonsensical questions to validate that person, asking what family he or she is from, or what education he or she has. This problem can only be solved by a social cultural revolution” ((Lumumba, 2004, p.2-3). And former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, now in exile in South Africa, said in a speech to a conference in Pretoria, “Most of Haitian bourgeoisie consists of prototypes of mental slaves. These individuals are like house-slaves who are mentally enslaved to neo-colonial masters” (Aristide, 2005).

People in the Haitian middle class may lack shared class values or solidarity, because membership in this class is more relatively fluid. There is more striving by individuals or families to be regarded as middle class, and more superficial, appearance-based posturing of 'belonging'. Criteria for belonging to the middle class are education, the mastery or appearance of mastery of French, non-manual occupation, and moderate income allowing a style of life (and some slight degree of security beyond the daily eking of hand-to-mouth) above that of the masses. In the middle class, family prestige and color play secondary roles to material wealth as the status-giver. This class is generally of mixed blood, although the Negroid characteristics predominate. Since the man behind the title is very interchangeable in Haitian politics, government and middle-class

businesses or professions, this impermanency prevents individuals in this class from achieving status stability. As a result, this class is socially insecure, self-conscious, sensitive, and suspicious. It is the most overtly color-conscious, in that members of the middle class have a latent inferiority complex towards the bourgeoisie, resent them, and accuse them of color discrimination. This middle class recognizes education as the easiest avenue of social mobility, and strives to give their children a maximum of education, paying for the best schools that they can possibly afford, often to the detriment of family economics overall.

The urban proletariat now represents about 50 percent of the urban population. It is largely concentrated in Port au Prince and to a lesser degree in the nine coastal towns (Cap Haïtien, Port de Paix, Gonaïves, Jacmel, Les Cayes, Jérémie, etc.). Migration from the rural areas by peasants has increased considerably, but in most cases, the peasant's hope for a better life results merely in exchanging one misery for another. There is simply no industry, there are simply no jobs, to absorb this migration. The education of the urban poor and the rural poor, who together represent from 78% to 88% of Haiti's population, ranges from complete illiteracy to a few years of schooling. As far as the peasants are concerned, it is ironic that in spite of their incredibly low standard of living, their lack of political power and their illiteracy, they are nevertheless responsible for the existence of Haiti. Their ancestors did the fighting which threw off the yoke of slavery; they have created the Creole language, the rich folklore, the syncretised folk religion, and picturesque culture for which Haiti is known to the world; they provide the crops on which the nation's economy is dependent.



It is the middle class, the rising working class (former urban poor or urban proletariat, now occupying the lower echelons of shopkeepers, small-business owners, market-sellers, school teachers, lesser government employees, clerks, factory workers, and artisans) and the rural peasant/poor class whose members (and their mores) interest me the most, since the majority of the Haitian adolescent immigrant students I see in high school in my geographic area are the progeny of parents and/or guardians belonging to these fluid and interrelated groups. I do not get any students from the Haitian bourgeoisie in my public high school classes. It is among these middle-class and working-class Haitian groups that I suspect there has been a very generalized acceptance and internalization of beliefs that the more superficial symbols and signs of ‘success’ are more than adequate for their purposes in life. If this is so, then there is a relationship between societal practices and mores in Haiti and practices/actions among these immigrants here in the USA, one which leads to a mostly appearance-based, postured positioning of the concept of success. For young Haitians in the local school system, having many outfits of expensive brand-name clothing and \$200 sneakers, wearing a heavy gold chain and rings, having a job, a cell phone and later a car, and being said even later to attend college are the summits of their ambition. Never mind that their parents or themselves are spending almost all of their wages on the expensive outfits and sneakers and gold jewelry; never mind that the job is at Walmart’s or bussing tables in a restaurant; and it doesn’t matter that the said attendance at community college is actually in “developmental” classes (which do not lead to credits towards any degree).

A quote from an urban Haitian male, a working-class-origin professional now in engineering, is illustrative of the current mind-set about the appearance of success in Haitian society.

*“Apparence plus Bluff egale Résistance ! A travers l’apparence et les mensonges que l’on donne, la personne peut conserver sa fraîcheur et sa résistance. Si l’autre personne n’a pas découvert la vérité, l’on conserve la résistance, c’est pour conserver la face »* (Reginald Jean Pierre, personal communication, July 25, 2004).

[Appearance plus bluff equals resistance! Through the appearance and the lies that one gives out, a person can keep his freshness and his resistance. If the other person does not discover the truth, one conserves his resistance, which means to not lose face.]

Impeccable personal cleanliness and attention to good grooming is an absolute must on every level of Haitian society. Haitian people (particularly middle class and former working-class origin) love modish new clothes and shoes, and will strain their budgets to the utmost to possess these. This latter value on good clothing and appearance is sometimes in conflict with the Americans’ more relaxed, less formal notions about personal appearance and frequently less preoccupation with grooming or modish clothing styles, particularly for ‘unimportant’ appearances outside of one’s house, for example, to go food shopping, to the beach, to play games, etc. Haitians of all ages are very attentive to personal appearance.

There is a Haitian aphorism which states that a rich Haitian is a mulatto, but a poor Haitian is just a black Haitian. This little saying illuminates the Haitian feeling with respect to shade of skin color versus economic possibility and class, or vice versa.

Charles (1992) explains that “In Caribbean societies, the construction of racial/color categories is complex. The phenotypic variety is so great that it becomes necessary to use socio-economic referents in the ascription of color. Race/color is not constructed into mutually exclusive, bipolar categories of black/white. Rather there is a continuum, conceptualized as a gradation along the lines of color. While blackness mediates class, class always qualifies race/color. Poverty, as an affect of class position, is equated with blackness and affluence is associated with light skin. Thus racial category and racial meaning have a social character” (Charles, 1992, p. 107). Trouillot in ‘Haiti: State Against Nation’ also wrote at length explaining the relationships between skin color, phenotype and social relations. To summarize his chapter, “Haitian color categories refer not only to skin color and other somatic features, but to a large range of sociocultural attributes that do not have a somatic referent” (Trouillot, 1990, p. 113). Anecdotally, Haitian adolescents report growing up hearing frequent comments, nicknames and epithets about their skin-color from their peers and classmates, being called names such as “chabon” [coal] or “Kannèl” [cinnamon], none of which name-calling they recall as being remotely affectionate or nice.

Color proves to be a singularly powerful and enduring symbol of social and economic mobility. Modern day social hierarchy in Haiti has its roots in the colonial context, where planters stratified laborers in order to maximize their control. “Systematic reinforcement of psycho-social structures established during slavery must be factored into any analysis of Haiti, for economic explanations alone do not explain the continuance of racism, and the pervasive operation of color castes” (Johnson, 2004, p.63). Hauntingly, the socioeconomic inequalities and stereotypes about blacks that were formulated under

slavery persist. In order to nuance the position of the writers who explain Haitian society through the lenses of caste/class discriminations, there are in addition the authors who explain these discriminations through the basis of skin-color identity.

One current Haitian commentator says, “For Haitians, shades of black have been almost the sole determinant to social class and position. As such, certain folks experience mobility or the lack of it because of their shade of black. In Miami, where I live, for example, the shade of black is the sole determinant in my interactions with other Haitians. I would have been their *ti moun* [small servant person] back in Haiti and they are my social superiors here, and they act accordingly” (Pierre, 2004, p.1). Ms. Pierre goes on to say, “I was warned about the color coded reality of Miami or the color problems here. In South Florida the body is so important in social constructions of human beings. The dark chocolate Haitians see me as a wannabe middle class....The lighter skinned Haitians in my city are just as prejudiced and oppressive. They are almost exclusively white-identified” (Pierre, 2004, p.1). This is but a sample of the kinds of remarks that Haitian adults make to explain statements and judgments based on color which are made by fellow Haitians.

Mason sums up the situation about color and economics (and the level of corruption in Haiti) when she says, “This ‘color’ social divide in Haiti exists, and it determines just about everything with regard to a child’s nurturing, education, career choice (water carrier or college bound?), contextualization, friendships, marriage possibilities, etc. At almost every point of every human interaction I ever witnessed in Haiti, color and/or hue (along with class positioning and money under the table) helped to determine whether a person had a hearing or a fair chance at obtaining what was supposed to be a freely-

available public service, let alone access to a viable career track or the passing of the Bac!” (Mason, 2004, p. 2).

But another writer feels that there is not a ‘mentality’ problem among Haitians, rather there is an ‘opportunity’ problem in Haiti, and that is why the people leave. “Those who get to the United States demonstrate a very modern mentality: they work multiple jobs, save money, get educated, push themselves up the economic ladder, live in crowded apartments and work long hours” (Laleau, 2004, p.1).

The common experience of exile and of being black and foreign has not united Haitians. Restratification and relegation to the lowest status category of United States society have exacerbated the transferred conflicts over social identity. The attempts to recreate the traditional class status system have become a source of contention, conflict, misunderstanding, and intergenerational disaccord.

### Haitian Immigrants in the USA

“Haitians have attempted to reconstruct parts of their culture in the U.S. and Canada. As with previous immigrant groups, they have confronted prejudice and discrimination that demean their native culture and demand assimilation. Many Haitians do assimilate, especially those who are born in the United States or Canada” (Stepick, 1998, p. 97).

So what happens to his or her class position and status, when a Haitian immigrant lives in the United States? Charles answers this question very clearly, and her answer is extremely important to my own research. “While in Haiti, variables like education, wealth and income, and family background are linked together in defining class and

status position, in the United States these variables do not operate on the same dynamics. For the majority of Haitian immigrants, the goal is not to achieve social status but to have a better economic position and more importantly, to save. Therefore, it is possible to separate position in the workplace, which gives access to economic betterment, from their social and cultural life, which takes place primarily in reference to Haiti. All values and norms that signify status and social mobility are in reference to the Haitian social structure. This can be more clearly understood when a working class immigrant works hard to pay for a month's vacation in Haiti. The dominant motive is to arrive and to display the acquired new wealth. The same behavior is also present among members of the middle class who own a luxurious house in Haiti that they can maintain only with their employment in the United States" (Charles, 1992, p. 115). In layman's terms, the goal is to show off.

In general, the upward mobility of Haitians is hampered by their inadequate knowledge of English, their status as undocumented immigrants, their lack of skills relevant to an urban, industrialized society, and heavy financial commitments to families in Haiti. Being a black non-English-speaking immigrant profoundly affects the nature of relations and the available assimilation paths. Within the context of black, inner-city schools, young Haitian immigrants either remain Haitians or they become black Americans. Within this limited context, African-American youth have cultural power. Haitian immigrants in these schools assimilate, at least superficially, to inner-city African-American culture. Even in the 'less inner-city' Southwest Florida environment, these two assimilation paths have become evident among the Haitian teens: remain Haitian or become African-American? We are asking students to resolve the tension and

figure out how to meld their identity to become academically successful Haitian-Americans, when they do not have many role-models to imitate.

One cannot miss those Haitians who have not yet assimilated to African-American culture. The very-recently-arrived immigrant adolescents speak Creole exclusively. The guys wear dress pants with a belt at their waist, cotton button-down shirts, and soft loafers with no socks. Many of the girls wear long skirts or dresses that cover much of their bodies; they seemingly have no idea of what is fashionable dress in the United States. They are also very shy and almost never speak to anyone except the teacher and their most intimate girlfriends. Everyone knows (can see at a glance) that these men and boys, women and girls are Haitian immigrants. On the other hand, assimilated Haitian males wear athletically-themed or very-fashionable, expensive “outfits” bought in the most popular brand names, in which everything from head to toe matches, from sneakers through socks through baggy shorts worn very low (far down from the waist) to t-shirt, matching long-sleeved shirt, and cap or hat (or doo-rag or bandanna) or sunglasses. These “outfits” which I have just described and which sound only suitable for boys in their teenage years, are now being worn by local Haitian males well into their thirties. Haitian females who are assimilated to American styles and mores, dress in modern, coordinated clothes with more freedom of style, and with more than a hint of sexual suggestion, in the tightness / clinginess or shortness of skirts/shorts, etc. They almost always have fancy hairdos and modish high heels.

The more assimilated Haitians - boys and girls - speak together in Creole and in English, with a lot of code-switching. They ‘could’ speak exclusively in English, but it is fashionable in the Fort Myers Haitian adolescent circles to still speak Creole together or

to code-switch back and forth a lot. One can also tell by the degree of banter which a Haitian female engages in aloud with Haitian males in the classroom, as to how long she has been in the USA and how assimilated she is. Recently-arrived females never engage in classroom banter with males or females (or indeed, in speech above a whisper which is exclusively to the teacher alone at the desk). In the girls who are truly shy or very rigidly/strictly brought up, they will never engage in banter in classrooms even after three or more years in a Florida high school. 'Just-come' males DO engage in banter with each other, and with all Haitian males in the room, as soon as they are comfortable enough in the presence of the teacher to do so at all. No matter how assimilated they are, in my experience almost all Haitian youth are extremely polite and respectful to adults (unless extremely upset or angry in some specific situation), and they are as respectful and polite to all the paraprofessionals (aides) as to the teachers and administrators.

Haitians with enough resources to live in the middle class (African-American or ethnically mixed) neighborhoods encounter a more prosperous and optimistic America than those in the poor inner-city areas. They interact with more adolescent peers who believe that education promises a better future. They are also less likely to encounter intense, specifically anti-Haitian prejudice, and more likely to encounter general anti-black racism. Middle-class Haitians are more likely to retain pride in their national origins and become hyphenated Haitian-Americans. In contrast, those Haitians who are residents of the "inner-city" or very poor neighborhoods encounter a different America, an overwhelmingly poor one. Their proximal hosts are African-Americans. The people they see daily in their neighborhood are neither white nor middle class. When these young Haitians assimilate, when they Americanize, they become not generic, mainstream



Americans but specifically ‘poor African-Americans’ most vulnerable to American racism. They assimilate to African-American body language, speech patterns, sports, dress, and hairstyles. (Stepick, et.al., 2003).

There is a dichotomy of seemingly mutually exclusive attitudes which nevertheless exist simultaneously in Haitian immigrants’ minds, and I sum them up as follows: 1) “foreign is better” and 2) “I want to live as a Haitian forever”. Culture is a battleground in the modern-day struggles over economic development. Martineau explains the two conflicting attitudes in the following ways: “It is as if a concerted effort was being made [in Haiti] to give our youth foreign heroes who know nothing about their life, their aspirations and their plight. It is no wonder that a sizable portion of the Haitian youth aspire to leave the country instead of working to make a better life where they are!” and “The Haitian people cannot be satisfied outside of their culture, meaning the pride in their history, the respect of their traditions, the taste of their food. Even away from their homeland, they speak, live, act and react as Haitians” (Martineau, 1996, p.245).

The Haitian diaspora community is highly differentiated and divided along the lines of social class (as they define it) and color. This community uses their particular set of cultural conceptions and historical experiences to constitute their social reality. Their reputation as a “French-speaking” population (although Haitian-Creole is certainly not the same as French) also allows them to perceive themselves and to be perceived by the wider society as a distinct ethnic population. Like other Caribbean immigrants, they suffer double invisibility as immigrants and black immigrants, or double visibility as blacks in the eyes of whites and as foreigners in the eyes of native-born blacks. In other words, they are *de fwa nwa* [two times black]. In addition, Haitians often bear the stigma

of being suspected ‘illegal aliens’ (whether or not they possess the proper documents), and of coming from the poorest country in the western hemisphere. “From the perspective of American society, the Haitian population appears to be relatively homogeneous: to be composed of individuals who share the same racial heritage, culture, language, and country of origin. Haitians, however, do not believe that a community exists in the sense of a united organized group of people” (Buchanan, 1983, p. 9). Although the major distinguishing feature of *klas* [class] in Haiti is wealth, level of education (equated to a great extent with one’s ability to speak French), ancestry, comportment, occupation, and lifestyle also provide the basis for social class distinctions. The combination of racism and xenophobia in America hits newcomer Haitians especially hard. Coming as they do from a practically all-black country, many members of the Haitian middle classes have never experienced racism or xenophobia in their entire lives. In Haiti, foreigners are usually welcomed.

One response to employment difficulties has been the creation of small and informal Haitian businesses. “Most Haitian self-employed, informal entrepreneurs become full-time informal sector entrepreneurs, usually when they have no choice or when they lose (or cannot obtain) salaried labor employment. The most common activities are: dressmaking and tailoring; petty commerce; food preparation; child care; transportation; and the provision of semi-skilled services such as construction work, automobile repair, and electronic repair. These activities clearly are survival strategies that produce goods and services consumed exclusively within the Haitian community” (Stepick, 1992, p. 68). Unfortunately, these activities provide only an income close to the poverty threshold. In Fort Myers, small Haitian businesses, usually store-fronts but sometimes conducted from

in people's houses, have sprung up rapidly. There have been numerous unlicensed Haitian restaurants, most of which have been closed down by the city authorities whenever they are "discovered", to be gradually replaced over time by small licensed storefront Haitian restaurants. It's not that this city's licensing and permit application process is more difficult or laborious than it is anywhere else in the USA; Haitians are not used to, and are naturally resistant to, "formal" application and other processes and procedures of this nature, always preferring to conduct their business informally if at all possible. They have a 'cultural'/historical dislike of asking government offices for anything; which is not surprising, given the way things are run in Haiti.

Radio broadcasting is very important to an ethnic community with a high proportion of adult illiterates. Haitian-owned Creole-language radio stations locally were another case in point: there were as many as eleven (11) unlicensed attempts in Fort Myers shut down by the FCC (and all their broadcasting equipment confiscated, and hefty fines had to be paid) before the local Haitian radio-wannabe-entrepreneurs got the message that they really couldn't have a radio station in this country without a permit being given for it. Now (in 2005) there are three Haitian licensed radio stations in the Fort Myers area, although all of them are on sub-carriers (either you need a special gadget attached to your radio to be able to hear them, or if broadcasting on clear channels, they can be heard at certain hours only). Most Haitians in Southwest Florida, as in Haiti, listen to Creole-language radio to get news and to hear Haitian music or talk-shows.

In the Haitian community, the most popular organizations are definitely religious ones. "Compared to other recent immigrant groups to the United States, Haitians are

exceptionally religious. Nearly 75 percent of recent Haitian immigrants reported in 1985 that they attended church at least weekly. Store-front Protestant churches abound. Most have small congregations numbering under fifty, and what few services they offer (beyond religious rituals) reach only their own members” (Stepick, 1992, p. 73). This portrait continues to be the case here locally – small congregations, non-ordained or self-ordained Haitian preachers for the most part, and all formal and informal ‘business’ in the church conducted in Creole or sometimes French. Locally, the Haitians are variously Catholics, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Methodists, Lutherans, etc. If one really wanted to ‘reach’ a majority of Haitian parents in the Fort Myers (SW Florida) community, the best way to do it would be through their churches. I think that locally the 75% figure from Stepick’s work would be “low”, and that probably as many as 90 percent of Haitian adults and adolescents attend a church regularly. In the adult Haitian groups with whom I do some community-service volunteer work, we have often discussed getting our messages out, distributing flyers, or otherwise visiting churches to be able to discuss educational issues with the Haitian parents; but the task seems somewhat daunting. There are so many small Haitian churches springing up very rapidly that no centralized listing attempt (even if one were disposed to try to list them all) can keep up with them.

In her 1983 writing, Buchanan commented, “On the point of education, many middle-class Haitians are better educated than bourgeois Haitians who have inherited their wealth and have not pursued their educations” (Buchanan, 1983, p.12), but this is no longer true. The current experience of the middle-class and working-class urban and rural Haitian adolescent immigrant students whom we are receiving into Florida public schools

has been somewhat mediated by other factors than economics. Anecdotally, through experience and through interviewing, I have learned that the prevailing mindset in Haiti nowadays is that a young student who knows or believes that ‘someday’ he will receive a visa to immigrate to the USA (through a parent already residing in the USA and in the Immigration paperwork-process), is typically not applying himself with much concentration to his academic studies in Haiti. Apparently – again, this is what I have been told by Haitian adults – many middle class Haitian youth in Haiti are simply in a “waiting” mode; they are biding their time; they are occupying seats in schools; they are waiting for the day they depart for America. They have not thought (or been taught to realize) that any general knowledge learning, focusing, problem-solving, organizational skills, and academic skill-building which they do in school in Haiti will be useful to them in their future school in the USA. So they are spending several critical years of schooling in Haiti just ‘coasting along’, waiting to leave.

In general, Haitian high-school-aged students are arriving as 9<sup>th</sup> graders in my area with reading comprehension abilities on approximately the third-grade level, some 6 years behind their age/grade-level. We have their FCAT reading exam scores and other hard-data measures of reading-comprehension to be able to state this. And anecdotally (not with hard data), in the past 5 years, for every one Haitian high school student newcomer I receive in my classroom who is on his appropriate age/grade-level for general knowledge, for reading comprehension (reading in French or in Creole) and academic thinking skills, I receive another 10 or even 15 students who are not.

The statuses Haitian immigrants have found within American society have been affected by their social class backgrounds in Haiti (particularly their educational levels

and the skills they brought with them to the United States due to the schooling they received), their ability to speak English, and their incoming legal status. Some immigrants are able to retrain in their professions or in other fields and have eventually obtained jobs whose incomes place them in the American middle class, whereas some immigrants have not been able to move out of their jobs as unskilled workers or low-paying white-collar jobs. To maintain their own self-esteem sometimes, Haitian men, particularly those who have suffered a loss of status in terms of their employment, carry a briefcase and wear suits and ties to factory jobs, or hide the actual nature of their work. Most men and women lie about the actual nature of their work in the USA whenever they go back to visit Haiti on vacation.

Anecdotally, and in an even further degree of pretense, I can remark upon the nature of many Haitian men's business cards in the USA: they seem to have given themselves all sorts of titles and professions, which they might not be able to back up with actual diplomas and certificates on paper. Although these impostures and behaviors (carrying business cards listing imaginary degrees and professions) are self-esteem and face-saving mechanisms for some Haitian adults, obviously they do come into conflict with American social and professional norms. "By their own admission, Haitians are very *sansib* [sensitive] about the treatment they receive, and have finely tuned internal barometers which detect the least slight" (Buchanan, 1983, p.17). Unfortunately for them, Americans do not regard the unmasking of lying about professional degrees and qualifications as only in the category of "a slight" or a humiliating incident; this type of falsifying imposture is regarded as out-and-out fraud and is taken very seriously in the USA, even to the point of legal prosecution. An example of a typical American

sentiment when faced with a Haitian diasporan's business card listing bogus professions: "Apparently the process of certification for ANYTHING in Haiti is simply to get a business card printed, listing whichever random credentials you choose to award yourself with. Is it possible that these people believe that an 8 week vocational course certifies them to do ANY professional job they choose?" (E. Deluca, personal communication, May 2005).

There is a typical Haitian-Creole phrase which one hears many times daily from Haitian students and also Haitian adults, *Se pa fòt mwen* [It's not my fault]. I find in this Creole phrase a denial of responsibility for one's own actions which is contrary to our own American culture's emphasis on taking personal (individual) responsibility. 'Denying responsibility' is not noteworthy in and of itself -- particularly among teenagers -- but the prevalence of this phrase and attitude among Haitians, in everyday use and for any and all situations, perhaps is. This very tendency was remarked upon by Zora Neale Hurston way back in 1937, in her book "Tell My Horse", written about Haiti from field-notes of her stay there. "This self-deception takes another turn. It sounds a good deal like wishful thinking out loud. They would like to say that Haiti is a happy and well-ordered country and so they just say it, obvious facts to the contrary. There is a marked tendency to refuse responsibility for anything that is unfavorable" (Hurston, 1937). Echoing this same behavior pattern today, I have adolescent Haitian students in my focus group who state or believe that they are "successful" academically, even though the reality-measures (hard data) include their reading FCAT score which is hundreds of points below the passing score set by the state of Florida, and a Grade Equivalency test in reading

comprehension on approximately 3.5 (third grade, fifth month); in other words, they have no chance of getting a standard high school diploma here.

Buchanan's 1983 work really establishes a tone for my own research, even with the 22-year gap. Each paragraph resonates and informs what I am seeing in 2005 in Fort Myers: "If social divisions have considerable salience within the Haitian colony, the Haitians from lower social class backgrounds are often perceived by those from upper class backgrounds as becoming "Americanized" very quickly, that is, materialistic and money-hungry. Haitians from the elite class also criticize them for supposedly not taking advantage of the educational opportunities offered to them by American society, and for making money the central motivating force of their existence" (Buchanan, 1983, p. 24). "Although Haitians from lower-class backgrounds observe that in the United States "*tout moun egal ego*" [everyone is equal], because everyone has an opportunity to advance, class conscious Haitians tend to be very careful with whom they associate, and downward social and economic mobility does not foster relations among upper and lower class Haitians even when they occupy similar social and economic positions vis-à-vis American society" (Buchanan, 1983, p.25).

Carolle Charles' 1992 writing also speaks to what I observe in high school here and now, and the mind-set which I believe has filtered down to the Haitian adolescents. "Most Haitian immigrants see the United States as a place to work and to earn money. For many, and in particular for Haitians of working-class background, gaining a better economic position tends to be the most important parameter in their perception of the immigrant experience, and consequently of their assessment of the U.S. reality. All of their problems revolve around work and on how to survive and create better opportunities



for children and for relatives in Haiti. So long as Haiti is the primary reference point, there is no need to be assimilated as Americans, and less as black, for they already have a country of socio-cultural identity” (Charles, 1993, p. 114). Haitians often limit their social interactions to other Haitians. Stepick reported in 1992, “Three-fourths (78%) did not have a single Anglo friend. At the other extreme, almost the entire sample (97%) reported that their socializing took place mostly with other Haitians” (Stepick, 1992, p. 67). The continuing policy of “immigration persecution” (frequent deportations and/or being sent to Krome Detention Center), the legal confusion surrounding Haitians’ status (and working permits), and their social isolation have all contributed to Haitians’ dismal socioeconomic conditions in the USA.

Part of my probing of my focus group of Haitian high school students was intended to find out how they situate themselves, if they intend to remain in the USA; and if so, if they intend to continue thinking as their parents do, making Haiti “the primary reference point”. In general, they do not.

But another point that emerges from Charles’ 1992 work is this notion of Haitian parents “creating better opportunities for children”. That may be a stated goal, or a concept that Haitian middle-class and working-class parents carry as dear in their hearts and minds, but in the reality of present-day Fort Myers, we who try to work as volunteers with the local adult Haitian community find it next to impossible to get these parents to listen or to come out to any information sessions about how to help their students succeed in secondary school, what the students need to do and have in order to get a high school diploma, what the state standardized exam consists of and how to help prepare their children for it, etc. Anecdotally, working with the Fort Myers public library, if 3000

publicity flyers and posters (in English and Haitian-Creole) for secondary-school general-information sessions to be given in Creole (dates, times, venues, subjects to be covered) are sent out into the Haitian community (via Haitian churches, businesses, and the schools), we have been host to a maximum of 16 persons in one session and a minimum of 2 and 0 attendees in the last two sessions, over the past 6 information sessions of this academic year 2004-2005. So, working with the Haitian community of parents proves to be more frustrating and difficult in reality than when one accepts at face value their generalized stated goal of “educational betterment for their children”. And a corollary to this woeful adult turn-out to the Haitian community information sessions, is that the Haitian high school students laugh at us every time we send home more flyers, and they predict – with entire accuracy – that their parents won’t come.

#### Linguistic Issues in Haiti: French and Haitian-Creole

"Language denial. Language denigration. They talk about the Creole languages in terms like these: 'Ungrammatical', 'black language', 'dialect', 'substrate', 'inferior', 'broken', 'corrupt', 'patois', 'jargon', 'barbarous'..... **These are the epithets of subjugation!**" (Kamarah, 2005).

“Because culture is located not in individual mind but in activity, any study of language is by necessity a study of culture” (Hall, 2002, p.19).

While scholars debate the relative worth or value of Creole and French, the Haitian people simply go on speaking Creole all of their lives, quite sublimely unaware of the polemic interest of the rest of the world in their linguistic ‘situation’. The Haitian people,

for the most part, don't know that they "have" a 'linguistic situation', much less that scholars and educators talk and write about them or their language(s). "Haitians, of course, have their own folk models of language and may be particularly confused about Creole and French. A student grows up knowing that French has grammar and a written language, but that student has no linguistic sophistication about languages and certainly no analytical knowledge about his own Creole language" (Lawless, 1992, p.89). Haitian people have, feel and act on deeply ingrained ambiguities about the two languages.

No dimension of this research study has been more clearly divided along the "theory versus practice" line than that of the Haitian people's complex French vs. Creole linguistic issues. Haiti does have a language problem, but the problem is not difficult to understand, only difficult to solve. Haiti is neither bilingual nor diglossic. Among the Haitian diaspora population in South West Florida, there is more than just 'residual' sentiment that French is somehow 'better' than Creole, but it is becoming more and more subtle to detect, especially as concerns the youngsters. The ability to speak French (correctly) continues to be of high status among the Haitian people, the parents of the students, even if it is not particularly relevant to their daily existence (any more, if it ever was). To speak in French, or to note an error in someone else's French, is a way to take precedence in a social situation. Those Haitians who do speak French, are not able to "abandon their cherished French self" (Buchanan, 1979, p. 308). We must always bear in mind that the way things are in Haiti remains the 'primary reference point' from which Haitian diaspora people reflect about one's behavior, status, upbringing, etc. "One dimension along which status is judged or evaluated is the level of formal education received in Haiti. The ability to speak grammatically correct, fluent French is indicative

of a solid education and high social status, whereas the ability to speak only Creole indicates lower class origin and illiteracy” (Charles, 1992, p.17). Many Haitian parents will address their children in either French or English at home or in the street, to encourage them to learn those languages (or to show off). However, in some cases, these parents do not speak French or English very well, and so the children do not receive the necessary exposure to learn a fully complex language.

For example, there was one Haitian woman in my adult ESOL English/Literacy evening class in 2004-2005 who basically could not communicate with her own school-aged children. The third-grade boy, whom I had met and interacted with numerous times (he often came to the night class with his mother), could barely speak Creole at all (his level of aural/oral functioning in Creole was really low, and even though he had the best will in the world to help me out, he could not translate even simple messages for me to his mother or other Haitian adults). The mother basically gave him commands in Creole (or berated him in Creole when she thought he was being ‘bad’), and otherwise she spoke an extremely broken form of English pidgin to him. He spoke correct English back to his mother. I doubt if she understood much of what he said to her, or what he and his slightly-older brother said to each other in English.

But even those Haitians who prefer the French language, equate denial of knowledge of Creole with a repudiation of Haitian nationality and identity. The Creole language is very warm and energetic, and is full of proverbs, jokes, word-play, and metaphor. Stories told in Creole are an ongoing part of Haitian socialization of their children, and Haitian people (young and old) participate in these oral story-tellings in a variety of ways and at a variety of levels, depending on their age, the context, their prior

knowledge of the story, etc. I have seen vestiges of Haitian students' oral participation and echoing behavior and call-and-response type reactions to story-telling in my classroom from time to time, when they get to know stories and feel comfortable participating aloud.

Many the academic scholar, linguist, social commentator/sociologist, anthropologist, and modern curricularist has had occasion to comment on the French vs. Creole linguistic and linguist-educational issues of the Haitian people. (See Dejean, 1999 and 2001; Fass, 1988; Lawless, 1992; Magloire, 2000; Ministère de L'Education Nationale, 1996; Paquin, 1983; Rotberg, 1971; Spears, 1999; Stepick, 1998; Trouillot, 1990; Valdman, 1984; Védrine, 1994; and Weinstein, 1983.) It is not necessary to recapitulate all of their arguments here; nor do I wish to enter into the fray, since one ends up debating the relative worth of the linguistic discussion of the relative worth of the languages... (while Haitians carry on speaking Creole). The origins of this linguistic situation and the Haitian people's attitudes towards one or the other language were developed in the early days, during the colonial and post-colonial periods. "While the Haitian ruling classes loudly affirmed their irrevocable independence from France, and their distrust of, if not downright hostility towards, the race of the former tyrants, they ceaselessly proclaimed their allegiance to the French language, French culture, and the French way of life" (Hoffmann, 2003, p.8). One partial explanation is that the French language and culture were used by the Haitian ruling class as a very effective barrier to upward social mobility. It was particularly effective because the overwhelming majority of Haitians spoke and understood only the vernacular Creole. Making French the exclusive language of

pedagogy, administration and justice ensured that all education, hence all power, was reserved for the minute minority who could master it.

The Haitian ruling classes have traditionally looked down on Creole, proclaiming it a regional dialect at best, and at worst a simplified, degenerate form of French. (But, we may well ask, did they not get this attitude and world-view initially from their white French colonizers?) The ruling classes purposely and systematically kept the masses of the people from learning the dominant (dominant in the sense of power-wielding) language. On the other hand, the French language to which the Haitian ruling classes laid claim, has always had, at best, marginal significance or relevance for the enormous majority of their fellow-citizens. The elite Haitians' fetishistic attachment to the French language and way of life seems to continue, generation after generation, to exist in order to prove their capability to contribute to/ master the nuances and 'elegance' of Western civilization, although "who" they are proving this to (besides each other/themselves) is a matter of question. The resonances and habits of that embedded colonial education continue to make Haitians' behavior and attitudes feed into the very patterns of white Western civilizations' hegemony and dominance that the Haitian people claim to reject, repudiate, abjure, and abhor.

Haitians in the United States still express their conflicts over social identity and status through their controversies over language use. Fluency in French was traditionally associated in Haiti with power, authority, formal knowledge, and high social status. Buchanan commented, however, that "[There are] ...reverse values and associations. Equally strong feelings exist that French is the language of pretense, duplicity, deceit, and falseness; conversely the lowness of Haitian Creole is identified with positive traits, such

as truth, integrity, sincerity, and genuineness. According to this schema, French represents the inherent divisiveness of the Haitian color-class hierarchy and Haitian Creole signals equality” (Buchanan, 1979, p.301). Creole is widely used now in public forums, and especially in radio and television, especially for advertising. How Haitians wish to represent themselves to the wider American society, and what languages Haitian community leaders can or do speak, continue to be vehicles for debate and status/image discussions, although less (in America) than they were 20 years ago. French (the ability to speak French) has a strategic value in different social, formal, public, and educational contexts, although I have seen evidence of this vestigial ‘French-language = high-status’ mind-set dying out. They now regard English as language necessary for survival and as the language of the younger generation. For many Haitians who do not speak French, English is replacing French as their language of status and prestige and is a means of culturally validating their achievements in United States society. “It is possible that more Haitians now speak English rather than French as their second language” (Buchanan, 1979, p.299).

The period following the fall of the Duvalier regime brought the constitutional recognition of Haitian Creole as the country’s official language of first rank. The Haitian constitution of 1987 recognizes two official languages in the republic of Haiti: French and Creole. Official documents have to appear in both languages. On the other hand, “the everyday reality of the two languages places functional comprehension at 25% and 100% for French and Creole respectively” (Canal, 2004, p.1). I have also seen the statistic for functional comprehension of French cited elsewhere much lower than that, at about 10% or 15% of the population only. There seems to be general

agreement among scholars that the linguistic situation in Haiti cannot be termed diglossia, because the usual linguistic definition of diglossia is a situation in which at least two versions of the same language are spoken by varying socioeconomic segments of the population, or two versions are spoken by all of the population for varying reasons. Haiti does not present the situation of diglossia as the coexistence of two languages or varieties of language which are present within the same speech community, but one of which is accorded high prestige and the other variety, low prestige. “In Haiti, French is a second language for all Haitians, all of whom speak Creole as their first language” (Lawless, 2004, p.1). French may be (is) the power-dominant language in this case and is spoken by a minority of the population, and it is also the imposed language; while 85% to 90% of the population is monolingual, speaking only Creole, the vernacular language. Creole/Kreyol is the dominant language at the oral level.

Haitian-Creole is the first language of some 8 million speakers in Haiti and elsewhere. It has an official orthography, and it cannot be flexible in its spelling. In the evolution of a language, part of its being considered a ‘real language’ versus a dialect, is the presence of an orthographic system, a literature, a separate cultural history, and so on. Docteed commented, “It is important to standardize a writing system in the interest of legitimizing a language – in this case Haitian Creole – in order for everyone to recognize it as a language in its own right. If people in Haiti and around the world do not have a sense that the language has a correct/true writing system, then when it is spelled arbitrarily, people may think that it is not a valid means of communication” (Docteed, 2004, p.1). There have been three attempts to standardize the orthography of Haitian Creole: a) McConnell-Laubach, dating from the 1940’s; b) Pressoir-Faublas, dating from



the 1950's; and c) Institut Pédagogique Nationale (IPN), dating from the 1980's. This latter system was established by the Joseph Bernard decree of December 1979 – January 1980. “The IPN orthography is most prevalent in current Haitian literature and in the Haitian school system; Haitians seem to be complying across the board, in schools, in churches, in the press and in all sorts of official and unofficial publications, in a new Bible edition as well as in current publishing standards” (Antoine, 2004, p.2). Much of the publishing of textbooks in Creole is carried out by private organizations, particularly religious ones. “Protestant groups in Haiti publish textbooks for all levels of education, including secondary schools. Catholic groups have concentrated on books for adult education and rural development. Some overseas Haitian groups are also publishing books in Creole on, for example, Haitian history and geography (and language translation dictionaries), that could be used as textbooks” (Lawless, 1992, p 145-146).

Concurrent with a renewal of national/ethnic pride and the rise of Aristide's liberation-theology politics, in the late 80's and early 90's, came the wave of semi-acceptance among the Haitian people of the use of Creole for more purposes, including teaching Creole in some (but not all) public schools. “The official writing system found rapid acceptance among the community of Haitian writers in Creole as a whole. On the initiative of the Catholic Church, a national campaign against illiteracy was launched in the years 1986 – 1988. Political leaders are increasingly mindful of employing Creole as the favored mode of address in order to avoid public indignation” (Hilaire, 2003, p. 203).

But there is some debate whether the acceptance of their own language, Creole, as the ‘correct’ language of education of their children was really embraced by all the Haitian people, whether it was perhaps only in fashion for a short while, in vogue, a

pseudo-acceptance due to popular waves of pro-Haitian-ethnic-pride sentiments overall. The nation's sentiments have been mobilized in favor of Creole, though Creole has had some image problems in the past. I am not convinced that the pro-Creole movement had any depth nor lasting impact on the psyche of the Haitian people, even though Hilaire comments about it, "As for the educational system, current and recent generations of children are quite accustomed to using Creole as the standard writing system. These children are now attending university or taking their first steps in their working life, and are the vehicles of a new attitude towards the Haitian national language. The emotional charge involved will be all the more easily harnessed to combat illiteracy and to promote literary creativity in Creole of high quality" (Hilaire, 2003, p. 209). I would like to believe those statements, but funding for education in Haiti is miniscule, the government is ineffective, and the technical difficulties of implementing Creole as the national language of education are overwhelming.

I feel that the 'value', 'worth', or perception of the 'higher status' of the French language is still perpetuated (and very much alive) among the Haitian middle-class and working-class people with whom I work and speak every day in South West Florida. The attitude may be sometimes insidious, or subliminal, or apologetic, but it lingers. When it comes to French vs. Creole, there are feelings-within-feelings when finding out what Haitian people in the USA think. Sometimes the attitude can only be detected in the 'confession' tone of voice, the ever-so-slight lowering in shame of the head or eyes, the demeanor, when a Haitian diaspora person, adult or teenager, says, "I don't speak French", "I don't understand French", or "I didn't learn French in school". When a Haitian person says the latter, it is so often with a mixture of shame, sorrow, bravado, and

challenge in their voice and eyes. I think that they are inevitably wondering if their interlocutor (myself) is reflecting on the poorness of their education – hearing in their mind, perhaps, “You obviously went to a lower-class public school rather than private school if you didn’t learn any French at all!” – when in fact, the majority of Americans (including American teachers) are not aware of there being any particular issue or dichotomy in this simple statement of ethnic language origin. The conflicting attitudes towards French vs. Creole that my high school students displayed – sometimes so baldly, sometimes so subtly -- was one of the first aspects of my work with Haitian adolescents that got me interested in Haitian Studies. “Both the scientific study and the classroom (non)use of Creole languages are still mired in endless and unproductive controversy. Creole languages are vastly under-utilized in the education of their speakers due to, among other things, the common belief that these languages are expressively inadequate and intrinsically inferior to non-Creole languages. These claims – some of which seem deeply rooted in (post-)colonial history – have undermined both the scientific descriptions of Creole languages and the role that these languages should play in the education of (monolingual) Creolophones” (DeGraff, 2003, p.2).

A careful analysis of Haitian society reveals mistrust at various levels. Haitian people (parents) might well endorse out loud the idea that the Creole language, orthography and grammar should be taught in Haitian schools, or that all subjects/content areas should be taught in Creole in Haiti, while at the same time individually making sure that their own children receive a classical French education in a private school where 90% of the teaching is in French. They do not practice what they preach. Many Haitians lack confidence in themselves and in their own educational backgrounds. “The outcome

is that many Haitians are convinced that they have nothing in terms of ideas, wisdom, or insight to share. It is ‘other people’, who have an education or material resources, who need to solve societal problems. In a country where eighty percent [the percentage is disputed] of the population are illiterate, and where being illiterate means “*mwen pa konnen anyen*” [I know nothing at all], this is a crisis” (J. Engle, personal communication, February 12, 2005).

In the republic of Haiti itself, “The educated speak French. The commoners speak Creole. If you are an up-and-coming you would only speak French in public” (Coulter, 2004, p.1); whereas of course in the United States, the Haitian diaspora people tend to forget their status-concerns and conflicted attitudes about French in favor of learning the all-important English language. I say “all-important” only from an economic standpoint - one thing they do realize is that the more English they master, the better jobs they can get in the American economy. Anecdotally, though, through my recent work (2004-2005) in Adult Education night school classes, teaching Haitian low-literacy adults in a special ESOL English class designed for them, I have experienced first-hand that their idea of learning better English language is mostly aural/oral in nature. “Although it is believed that the future status of Haitian-Creole must derive from developments in Haiti, it is clear that Haitians living in the United States have been instrumental in pushing for change in the role that Creole plays in society. It has been in the U.S., and particularly in New York City [and Miami], where Haitian-Creole has slowly come to be accepted and used in official domains as the bona fide language of the Haitians” (Joseph, 1997, p.296).

## Education in Haiti

The 1987 Haitian Constitution has the following articles:

Article 32. The State guarantees the right to education. It sees to the physical, intellectual, moral, professional, social and civic training of the population.

Article 32 – 1. Education is the responsibility of the State and its territorial divisions. They must make schooling available to all, free of charge, and ensure that public and private sector teachers are properly trained.

Article 32 – 2. The first responsibility of the State is education of the masses, which is the only way the country can be developed. The State shall encourage and facilitate private enterprise in this field.

Article 32 – 3. Primary schooling is compulsory under penalties to be prescribed by law. Classroom facilities and teaching materials shall be provided by the State to elementary school students free of charge.

Article 32 – 9. The State has the duty to make all necessary provisions to intensify the literacy campaign for the masses.

Article 32 – 10. Teachers are entitled to a fair salary.

Article 33. There shall be freedom of education at all levels. This freedom shall be exercised under the control of the State. (United Haitians Home Page, 2005).

Numerous Haitian Studies scholars and writers have delved into the educational issues facing Haiti in the past and today (see Arthur, 2002; Civan, 1994; Dejean, 1999 & 2001; de Regt, 1984; Fass, 1990; Human Rights Watch, 1993; Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale de la Jeunesse et des Sports, 1996; Védrine, 1994). “*Se pa fòt mwen!* [It's not

my fault!] Never has a Haitian government and its leader taken the simple step of putting public education K-12 on the agenda” (Burke, 2004, p.1). Haiti’s constitution calls for free access to education for all, but the reality is far from that. A lack of government funding has left 85% of schools in private hands, mostly in religious groups’. “Families are spending over half of their yearly income sending their children to school. No other measure would be as popular as free elementary education for all. Unfortunately, a common thread to all Haitian governments has been the fear that the education of the electorate would make it [sic] that people in government would no longer be able to rob the country of its resources” (Raber, 2004, p.1). The average Haitian only makes between \$300 and \$400 a year, which they are supposed to feed, clothe and house a family on. “Haiti is the most expensive country in the Caribbean for primary education. And this for the country that is the poorest in the Caribbean. And remember, the system of not wanting the people to be educated started way back at the beginning of Haiti’s Independence!” (Labrom, 2004, p.1). Democracy will not work in Haiti until all people have access to quality elementary education. “Haitians pointed to education along with justice as two pillars of democracy, and that without them democracy is only a word without substance. Illiteracy in Haiti in 1999 was as high as 50 percent [the percentage is disputed and could be higher]. But voter education was certainly not emphasized by the government or by the international community. A more intensive program of civic education would widen the understanding of elections and democracy” (Mobekk, 2001, p.178).

Educational conditions during Aristide’s presidency are difficult to assess, since different groups (political or other) make claims along a spectrum ranging from the idea

that he did the most for education of any president, or that he did not nothing but enrich himself like all of Haiti's past presidents. "Since his reelection in November 2000, Aristide has pushed with mixed success a populist agenda of higher minimum wages, school construction, literacy programs....The Ministry of Education is so under-funded that while President Aristide prioritized building schools, tripling the number of schools in Haiti, the Ministry is now unable to pay teachers, resulting in a teachers' strike" (Clarke, 2003, p.1). Since the disputed departure of Aristide on February 29, 2004, "...political unrest has accelerated the decline of Haiti's schools, clouding children's prospects for an education. During waves of unrest, classes have been cancelled most days because neither students nor teachers want to risk trying to get to their schools" (Williams, 2004, p.1). Parents in Haiti say that it goes from bad to worse. "We need everything from chairs to books. Parents have no jobs so they can't afford to pay the school fees. We can't even get the state financing we were promised, because of the unrest" (Metellus, 2004, p.1).

In April of 2004, the UNICEF representative in Haiti, Françoise Gruloos-Ackermans, said, "Every child in Haiti has seen or been subjected to violence. 40% of Haitian children do not have access to education because they cannot afford school fees or even the cost of a uniform. A nationwide UNICEF assessment of Haiti has found that children are suffering severely from the effects of the country's recent upheaval. The conflict affected every child in Haiti because of an environment of impunity. The increase in violence meant that the supply of food was considerably reduced, medical help was virtually unobtainable, and schools were closed for months (Gruloos-

Ackermans, 2004, p.1-2). It is self-evident that children of any age cannot learn in such an environment.

Conditions of education at all levels are at an all-time low in Haiti. Efforts towards adult literacy have faltered or ceased. According to Felux, “The Ministry of Literacy has been abolished. Its previous work in establishing thousands of literacy centers helped lower Haiti’s illiteracy rate from 80% to below 50%” (Felux, 2004, p. 2). Cuba had been quite a major benefactor in Haiti, but the contract that Haiti had with Cuba in which over 500 Cuban doctors worked to treat Haiti’s poor and educate Haitian students is reportedly ‘under review’, and the medical school is being occupied by U.N. troops. Cubans in Haiti had also been very active in training Haitians who ran the national literacy program. As far as the elementary and secondary schools are concerned, materials are sadly lacking. One administrator told me that each class has only one textbook that 40 students are supposed to learn from, and when the students come home, they are expected to do their homework from candlelight, or under the streetlights, since most Haitians don’t have electricity. The teachers haven’t been paid in six months. Teachers are frequently educated only a few years beyond the class that they are teaching.

Another factor affecting the education of children and youth, which I noted in my observations in Haitian public schools (5/31/04 through 6/3/04), is the enormous amount of noise, the total lack of discipline or classroom/hallway management, throughout each school I visited, throughout the day. To quote from my own observations-notes, made as I sat in different classrooms in Port-au-Prince on different days, “It is extremely noisy and loud all over the school”. . . . “The noise outside the room is incredibly loud – there must be hundreds of kids shouting all over the school. The classrooms don’t have doors.”



... “How can the kids hear the teacher? The noise from the rest of the interior of the school is infernally loud!” ... “I can’t hear the teacher very well even though I’m about 3 meters away from her.” ... “...from the rest of the school there is the usual enormous din. Anyone would think that ‘several’ championship level basketball games were going on in the various wings of the school, with their spectators all screaming.” (Pichard, observation field notes, 2004). The general anarchy and lack of discipline that reigns in public schools in Haiti seems to reflect the anarchy, chaos, instability, violence and constant disorder on the streets of Port-au-Prince, in a microcosmic version of the current society as a whole.

On the classroom level, though, Haitian children are expected to respect and obey their teachers in Haitian schools. The child rarely initiates interaction with a teacher. The teacher’s authority in the classroom is absolute. Haitian parents expect to back the teacher up if necessary, but not to question him or her. “Expecting this sort of formality, Haitian students and parents frequently are puzzled by the informality of American classrooms” (Ballenger, 1999, p.20).

In addition to low investment by the successive Haitian governments, other factors figure in to the low attendance of school-age children and youth. These include unaffordably high tuition, the use of children in agriculture, the generally poor health and nutrition of the children, and the fact that 95 children per classroom is not uncommon in rural areas. “Also, there is very high teacher attrition, estimated at 9 – 10% per year, mainly because teachers are paid less than secretaries” (Lawless, 1992, p.148). The exact number of school teachers in Haiti right now is not known. The low salaries paid to teachers require them to hold two, three, or sometimes more contracts in one or

more schools. Many also have non-teaching jobs. Some teachers reportedly contract for as many as 40 teaching hours per week. Teaching loads of this size considerably reduce the quality of instruction. “About 43% of private school and 18% of public school contracts are held by those who are qualified to teach. In both public and private schools, a large percentage of teachers have only secondary school certificates themselves, or less. The low-income private schools [in poor neighborhoods] are more likely to employ those without secondary school certificates” (Improving the Efficiency of Educational Systems Consortium, 1987, p.615).

The combined effect of increasingly large numbers of students poorly prepared for secondary education, a heavily loaded and outdated curriculum, the sometimes indifferent and inadequately trained teachers and school directors, a poorly paid teaching staff, and crowded and inadequate school facilities suggests an instructional process that is anything but effective. Professional training and development, and pedagogical seminars for Haitian teachers are organized by private (charity) groups only, so there is little reason to expect different instructional styles from all those teachers who emphasize memorizing facts from teachers’ lectures and textbooks, and who do not act upon any notions of individual students having to learn any other academic skills.

I was a part of a teachers’ professional development group who did team-work in the summer of 2003 in Jérémie, Haiti, and I experienced first-hand the levels of functioning and of professional-development needs among Haitian secondary teachers in the province of Grande Anse, as well as witnessing and observing classrooms in Port-au-Prince. General secondary education in Haiti is academically oriented, deriving from the classical French model, with a heavy emphasis on theory over application. Anyone who

visits Haiti will recognize the high demand for secondary education, and the response of the private sector to meet this demand. In Port-au-Prince, especially, advertisements for secondary schools painted on public walls and over-the-streets banners are pervasive. The development of Haitian secondary education is not significantly influenced by publicly or governmentally formulated goals, objectives, and strategies. The dominant role played by private secondary schools restricts the degree to which the government can plan and focus secondary education on national development objectives. Implementation of any strategies for a closer partnership between the public and private sectors, especially as concerns secondary education, will pose substantial problems, will be politically sensitive, and will be looked upon with considerable suspicion, from the mass of people as well as from the schools' directors. Informed educators in Haiti generally agree that most school directors there have not had any specific training in school management or teacher supervision. In the lower quality public and private schools, the caliber of school administration is said to be especially poor. Teachers receive little direction, and financial considerations take precedence over academics.

“The rate of promotion is generally high in Haitian secondary education. Many students who do not perform well in a particular grade, enroll at the next grade in less demanding schools, rather than repeat the grade itself” (Improving the Efficiency of Educational Systems Consortium, 1987, p. 612). This is still the case today. So, it can be concluded from this that most Haitian students are used to thinking that if they do not do well in one school, they will simply change to another, thereby passing into the next class painlessly. Anything can be ‘bought’ in Haiti.

It is important to always bear in mind the level and amount of corruption and bribery present in Haitian society – schools are rank with it. Fake papers of all kinds are available – birth certificates, marriage and death certificates, fake passing report cards and school-promotions, etc., can be obtained from racketeers in under 24 hours. It is fairly easy to pay to register at a school and to get in at the grade-level one chooses. It is also easy to buy fake “carnet scolaires” [report cards] in Haiti. One public-school teacher in Port-au-Prince was interviewed who has a thriving side-business in fake report cards. He is able to buy report-card-stock (very heavy) paper, and he has managed to make fake, but official-looking, stamps and seals for imaginary schools. He has invented three non-existent schools, given them typical Haitian names like “College Joseph-Marie Victor” and “Institut Benedict Les Cayes”, and he makes extra money annually – under the table – in this form of corruption. Parents pay him to make fake passing report cards for their children, so that these Haitian students in Haiti can seem to have passed a given year of school and can move on into the next grade at a different school with their fake record of “promotion”. All they have to do is enroll at the new school and show their ‘promoted’ report card with a passing grade point average (“Moyenne”) from “Institut Benedict Les Cayes” to get into, for example, the next year of primary school or secondary school. There is absolutely no system-wide, country-wide checking organized, in Haiti, of transcripts or grades or diplomas. Any student can pay to claim anything he or she likes about himself and his/her academic performance, grade-level or diploma. The teacher who was interviewed, who makes pseudo report-cards, wanted to know if he could organize his corrupt business farther afield, and perhaps market these items - from his fake schools - in the United States, for needy Haitian immigrant students wishing to advance in

American schools. The notion that we have systems and mechanisms in place in the USA to check up on these types of things, academic records, was unknown to him. Country-wide corruption, and the need to make a living by profiting from it also, are a way of life and a 'given' for Haitian teachers.

Another result of their education via the French language in Haitian schools is that many children repeat grades until they drop out, tired of and frustrated by having the same subjects presented to them in a foreign language and not learning much of anything during the time they spend seated on school benches. This is an insidious result because they get the notion that school is a waste of time, just for show, incomprehensible, or useless. The equation of academic content learning with "useless, irrelevant, unrealistic gibberish" is thus reinforced in Haitian students before they emigrate to the USA, or if they remain in Haiti. Hence, going to school remains an activity which is "just for show" to Haitian society.

In 1982-1983, 22 years ago, the average number of students per class in Haiti was 52.6. In the public lycées [high schools], the ratio was 60.5 to 1 teacher. Unfortunately, now in many classrooms the number of students sometimes exceeds 100, from the primary grades through secondary grades to higher education levels. Anecdotally, one man with a university degree from Haiti reported to me that he spent several years in the mid-1990's taking notes while standing on a chair at the back of the university classrooms, looking over the heads of over 110 classmates, standing on tip-toes and craning his neck to see the board and writing/ holding his notebook 'in the air'.

As recently as my observations in June 2004 in Port au Prince, in the primary grades, making the children do whole-class-together choral repetition is the preferred

mode of ‘teaching’ in the classroom. As illustrations, I will give you some extracts from my May - June 2004 observation notes:

[Classroom 1] “Meanwhile, among those who are paying attention to the teacher, choral answers are the only possibility. The way it works is, the kids who are paying attention express “agreement”, or echo, or speak in unison with the teacher’s words when he pauses, i.e. they chime in about half-way through each sentence he utters, or they simply complete the sentence he has begun (if he stops without finishing the sentence). It is almost like a giant rehearsed script that they all know, or they are very good guessers. The kids are only anticipating, predicting and guessing the words that Mr. Eli is going to say, so as to jump in chorus-wise as soon as they have made their deduction of what words he is going to say or wants them to say. The only possibility for kids who are paying attention is to hear and participate in this scene -- multiple kids completing the teacher’s sentences all together. There are no individual answers (indeed, no questions are asked – all the sentences uttered in unison here are declarative ones). No children are called upon to respond individually. No children are called upon to “know” or “understand” anything by themselves. All formal activity is teacher-directed and teacher-centered. All formal activity involves choral (group) replies or sentence-completion of the teacher’s thoughts which are verbalized by himself. All formal activity is conducted in French.” ... [Classroom 2] “It is too difficult for me to determine how many kids are actually participating in this choral reading aloud. There is no call for a single individual child to ever decode anything – nary a word, nary an individual. (Do the pupils learn to read here by osmosis? By this choral-repetition process? Or do they not really learn to read in this particular room? Who is able to decode what, here? The sentences to repeat

are getting longer and longer – are the kids just pretending to participate?)” ...

[Classroom 3] “Choral-response is an art form in this room. Mr. Jean Pierre can start a word or phrase, and the ‘anticipation game’ has been perfected by the students – they seem to know (about 90% of the kids, 90% of the time) what to say to complete his thoughts aloud.” (Pichard, observation field notes, 2004).

Literacy in Creole is often generally regarded as a transitional step towards literacy in another language (French in Haiti, English in the USA and Canada) rather than an end in itself. Since Haiti’s 1860 Concordat with the Vatican, the Haitian Catholic Church and the educational system have largely been controlled and staffed by natives of France (and sometimes Belgium and Switzerland), or other French-speaking foreigners and missionaries. These institutions have been the primary conduits of French culture and language in Haiti, and the perpetuators of the myth of Francophone superiority over the traditions derived from the Haitian people’s African heritage. “Despite some of the educational reforms in the early 1980’s, students for the most part are still taught in French by teachers who often have only a tenuous grasp of French themselves. Promotion to the next grade is based more on the learning of [memorized lines in] French than on the mastery of subjects” (Lawless, 1992, p. 148). The prescribed curriculum for secondary schools was based on French educational traditions. “The present primary-school model copies the early twentieth-century French model, using the same textbooks and teaching techniques of one-way classical exposition by the teacher to passive students. Memorization is the key factor in both instruction and students’ evaluation” (Lawless, 1992, p.148). Curriculum specialists would describe the curriculum as being guided by the philosophy of perennialism. Education is seen as the development of

mental discipline and as being guided in young people through exposure to the ideas of the great thinkers of the past. The secondary curriculum is heavily loaded with respect to the number of subjects (9-10) taught each year. Students receive varying amounts of instruction during the secondary school cycle. (Also, their teachers are absent a lot, and not replaced by substitutes, as I noted in Chapter One.) General uniformity exists among schools and between the public and private sectors with respect to the curriculum being taught, and this is dictated by the state Baccalaureat exams. (Only between 20% and 40% of *philo* [last-year] students pass these national exams every year.)

#### Attendance Issues

In speaking of the mismatch between the Haitian educational system and ours in the United States, the realization comes that there is the matter of our placing students in Florida in grade-levels by their ages, whereas in Haiti they are placed by the year of schooling that they have finished, regardless of their age. “*Vous, vous les preparez en fonction de leurs âges. Nous, on les prepare en fonction de leurs années scolaires* » (R. Jean Pierre, personal communication, July 30, 2005). [You prepare them by their ages. We prepare them by their school-years.] In Haiti, it is the ultimate system of benchmarks per grade-level: if the students have not mastered knowing how to do A, B, and C, and mastered national standards X, Y, and Z, and passed state exams P, Q, R, they are never going to advance to the next grade. It doesn’t matter how old they are. There are students in their late teens in the primary grades of Haitian schools; there are students in their late twenties and early thirties in secondary grades in Haiti. The students in their



mid-to-late teens -- who might have been in their final years of primary school in Haiti -- are placed in 11<sup>th</sup> grade secondary in the United States. Naturally, they have neither the reading comprehension and literacy skills, nor the general knowledge, of their American peers in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. But it is not ‘their fault’, it is the Haitian system. They had not passed the requisite benchmarks and exams of the system in Haiti. Now they have emigrated to the USA, and entered our school system, with the equivalent of a primary school education at age 16 or 17. We do not need to seek too far to figure out why these Haitian adolescent students seem to be behind in many skills which we consider appropriate for high school. They are! But it is their national system which dictates this. They may have just finished third or fourth grade in Haiti when they left the country, and we place them by their ages into 11<sup>th</sup> grade in high school, so naturally they do not have the prior general knowledge base, or the organizational, study, or literacy skills necessary for the American secondary school.

Schools in Haiti, both public and private, keep registration lists of which children have been given a “seat” or a “place” in every given class, semester and/or year. On the other hand, daily attendance records are very spotty, sometimes nonexistent. Once a child has been given (and has paid the tuition for) a ‘seat’ in the school, the school is not too concerned with whether or not that child actually attends daily or not. Classroom teachers may or may not keep daily attendance records; if they do so, these are kept by hand and voice roll-calling. The school itself may or may not keep attendance records. Record-keeping in general is a very weak area in Haitian schools; there are very few adequate systems established, and almost no office supplies. ‘Systems thinking’, systematization and organization across districts or cities is not well-established (I would

go so far as to say that these are nonexistent); the access to practical supplies needed for record-keeping (ledgers, paper, filing cabinets, record-books) is hit-or-miss and dependent on the ebb and flow of tiny budgets. School-based and national administrators are not able to effectively ‘insist’ on anything with their teachers when it comes to attendance. Nothing whatsoever is computerized or electronic in Haitian schools. There is absolutely no communication or system organized between and among the schools, even between the various public (national, state-run) schools in one city (Port-au-Prince, the capital, for example). The state schools hire their personnel independently, they fire them; they take attendance for their student body or they don’t; they keep any kinds of records or they don’t; they have an operating budget which gets randomly changed from year to year (and then half the time the money doesn’t actually arrive anyway) depending on which government is in power and what ‘they’ are doing with state funds (or claiming to do and then corruptly enriching their personal coffers); the state schools charge registration, tuition, and test-fees independently of each other; etc.

The students may or may not go to some of their classes, or to school at all, on any given day; and there may or may not be consequences for absences. It often depends on the school (some of the private schools having much better reputations than all of the public ones). If the student has friends/peers willing to give him the day’s worth of notes to be copied, and/or if the student is absent frequently (or all of the time) but is able to pay for and show up for (and pass) the final exam of the course, then s/he has usually been considered to have passed the class. Usually it is only a child’s “*camarades de classe*” [peers] who are aware that s/he is missing from school, or who care. Occasionally nowadays some teachers will factor in some “assignments” grades from

daily work or homework into the final course-grade, but not always, and not in all schools or on all levels.

Consequently, unless the Haitian adolescent immigrant student incoming to Florida schools has received the very best sort of education in a Haitian private school, attendance rigor will never have been a factor in his or her passing of years of school or in his obtaining of final grades. Our Florida strictures on the expectations of regular attendance must be very carefully and overtly explained to Haitian newcomers, particularly in the secondary level, so that they are not surprised by losses of academic credit due to excessive absences. In Haiti, children and youth attend school because it is “the thing to do”, it is expected by their parents and their peers, it is highly ‘socially acceptable’ and ‘socially well-regarded’ to be seen dressed neatly in one’s school-uniform every day going to and fro; and unless the children are working (due to extreme familial financial need) or so poor as to be begging or wiping cars on the streets of the city, there is really nothing else to do every day for children/youth except to attend their school. Attending school is ‘the thing to do’ – but it is not because of much thought of what is actually done while they are ‘inside’ the school that matters in this society. Some Haitian parents might beat their children if they find out that they haven’t attended school – mostly because the tuition has been paid in advance, which is a sacrifice often putting a severe strain on the family budget. The parents will exercise more pressure and feel more strongly about regular attendance for something which has been pre-paid, than the limited pressures of the school’s non-rigorous attendance-keeping, or the daily realities of their missing teachers and irrelevant schoolwork will exercise on the young person’s mind.

But on the other hand, many Haitian parents (those who are uneducated themselves) have a very limited notion of what education ‘is’ or ‘means’, and what the role and responsibilities of a student in a classroom ‘are’, as far as his/her learning is concerned. For all they know or care, their child may be simply copying the daily notes from his peers willing to hand them over, as they did in their generation; memorization for final exams is the ultimate name of the game, not comprehension or understanding of subject-matter. Therefore, their children’s absences and presences in the classroom are not among the parents’ chief concerns, as long as the final results (final grades or final GPA) are worthy:

*« Tu vas à l’école, dix gourdes. Tu n’y vas pas, quinze gourdes. Les parents attendent les cahiers scolaires uniquement. Ils attendent pour voir les notes de leurs enfants, pour voir les moyennes. C’est comme si ils payaient l’école pour avoir les résultats, pour avoir des bonnes notes, les bonnes moyennes. Ce que se passe entre le jour de l’inscription et le jour des carnets, à la fin de l’année, ce n’est pas leur affaire »*

(R. Jean Pierre, personal communication, July 30, 2005).

[“You go to school, ten gourdes (30 cents). You don’t go, fifteen gourdes (45 cents). The parents are waiting solely for the report cards. They are waiting to see their children’s grades, to see their averages. It’s as if they were paying the school only for the results, to have good grades, to have good averages. Whatever happens between the day of the registration and the day that they distribute the report cards at the end of the year, that’s not their business.”]

Between the relaxed and chaotic atmosphere, the limited checking-up on their school-attendance overall, and the fact that so frequently Haitian teachers in Haiti do not

show up to teach their classes on any given day (resulting in extra recess time for the students, since there are no substitutes and no organized system of substitutes on hand), Haitian students also have a very hard time adapting to our American expectations concerning not being tardy to classes (every class, all day, every day). Our insistence on punctuality to every secondary class-period has never been a part of their daily reality in Haiti. These students' educational background: they have years of history of not knowing 'why' they are sitting in school; of having their presence in the seat as a matter of indifference; years of rote memorization and recitation being the only tasks; and/or their absences noted only as a pretense of 'something serious' – a pretense for which there are no real consequences.

Numerous Haitian students (adolescents who I have in school now, i.e., recent immigrants) have described to me a classroom-management technique used in Haiti by the teachers to make sure that the students are speaking only French in the classrooms all day long. If a student is heard by the teacher speaking Creole, the teacher hands this pupil a *symbole* [symbol] which could be a piece of paper or a piece of wood or anything which the class knows represents the *symbole* in that room; which means that the teacher is telling the child "I have just heard you speaking Creole"; and if the child challenges the teacher with "What did I say in Creole?", the teacher will repeat back to the child what s/he said, but in French translation instead. So the pupil generally is forced to acknowledge that the teacher heard aright and indeed, Creole had been spoken. Then Student #1 has the dreaded *symbole* on his/her desk. So that student is now trying to listen all day long to hear the next person in the room making a mistake and speaking Creole in the classroom, because when/if he hears someone else, he has the right to pass

on the *symbole* to Student #2 'guilty' of speaking Creole. And Student #1 will tell Student #2 how to say what he had wanted to say correctly in French instead, if s/he can. And the *symbole* passes from desk to desk throughout the day, with students listening to and spying on one another so as to get rid of the *symbole*, the stigma of speaking the 'wrong language' in the classroom. And the student who has the *symbole* on their desk at the end of the day (because s/he wasn't able to get rid of it by passing it on) may get a beating or a whipping or some strikes of the rigwaz. The consequence of a beating or strikes did not seem to be an absolute rule, but varied from school to school. My students report that they absolutely dreaded having the *symbole* on their desks, it was a sign of shame if they were caught speaking Creole instead of French. And my students also reported to me that they preferred not speaking in school at all rather than making any linguistic mistake. Many females reported staying 'mute' all day in school rather than taking any risks.

As concerns early literacy behaviors, story-book reading is not a typical part of Haitian family life, no matter how adequate the reading skills of the parents or the literacy level of the family. "Haitian people rarely read for pleasure, and very rarely with children. They seem (in the middle and working classes) to be relatively unconcerned with print, as if it played little role in their lives" (Ballenger, 1999, p. 23).

### Curriculum and Exams in Haiti

The following paragraphs are an explanation of the Haitian national school system's organization of the years of school that a student goes through, and my understanding of

the system is based on my series of interviews with a public-school teacher, named Mr. Leslie Jean Pierre, in the Martissant district of Port-au-Prince in 2003 and 2004.

Kindergarten lasts two to three years, and in it a child learns pre-reading skills, colors, shapes, letters and phonemic awareness.

There are three "Cycles d'études" [cycles of studies] in the Haitian school system. The Premier Cycle [first cycle], also called Fondamentale [fundamental], consists of the first three primary grades, Première Année, Deuxième Année and Troisième Année Fondamentales [first, second and third grades].

The Deuxième Cycle [second cycle] consists of the next three years of primary grades, Quatrième Année, Cinquième Année and Sixième Année Fondamentales [4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades].

At the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> primary grade, the students have to take a state exam leading to what is called the C.E.P. or "Certificat d'études primaires". It is administered every month of June to the students finishing the 6<sup>th</sup> primary grade, whatever their age.

The Troisième Cycle [third cycle] consists of what we would consider to be roughly the middle grades, Septième Année, Huitième Année and Neuvième Année [7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades]. At the end of his/her 9<sup>th</sup> grade, the student has to take another state exam, successful passage of which allows the student entrance into the "Classes Humanitaires" [Humanities classes], or secondary levels of schooling.

The secondary years of school in Haiti are named in reverse-number order (for American minds): Troisième (3<sup>rd</sup>) Secondaire is our high school 10<sup>th</sup> grade, Deuxième (2<sup>nd</sup>) Secondaire is our 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and Première (1<sup>st</sup>) Secondaire, the school-year which is commonly called "Rhéto", is our 12<sup>th</sup> grade. At the end of the Rhéto year, the students

take a state exam, the First Baccalauréat (Baccalauréat Première Partie). If they pass this exam, they can continue for one more year of school, to the 13<sup>th</sup> year (of secondary level), commonly called the "Philo" [Philosophy]. This is the "Classe Terminale" [terminal year of secondary school]. After this "Philo" year of school, the students take yet another state exam, the Deuxième Baccalauréat (2<sup>nd</sup> baccalauréat). Passing this exam - reputedly very difficult - allows a student to enter into university in Haiti. Mr. Jean-Pierre said that 5 subjects are chosen annually to be on the 2<sup>nd</sup> baccalauréat exam, these 5 subjects being chosen by a system of lottery.

According to Mr. Jean Pierre, if the students have not paid their school tuition, they cannot be enrolled on the registration form for the state exams. The public school's tuition is 50 Haitian dollars annually. (50 HD = 250 Haitian gourdes = approximately \$6.25 U.S.) There is also a one-time-only entry/registration fee into a school, of 900 Haitian dollars. (900 HD = 4500 Haitian gourdes = \$112.50 U.S.) Speaking further about the state examinations, Mr. Jean Pierre alleges that there is a lot of corruption and trickery vis-à-vis the administration of these, corruption present "à tous les niveaux" [on all levels]. Mr. Jean Pierre stated that the exams are sometimes "sur la rue" [on the streets] (he means that the contents of the exams are well-known) before the actual exam dates. He attributes this corrupt situation to the Ministry of Education not being able to safeguard the security of the tests' contents.

*"Le BUNEX, on fait appel à des professeurs pour composer des problèmes dans l'examen, et parmi ces professeurs et questions on fait une sélection .... parfois ces professeurs révèlent les questions avant la date de l'examen de l'état. Ou ils donnent aux élèves trente questions à préparer chez eux."*



[The B.U.N.E.X. [Bureau des examens d'état = State examination office] asks professors to write problems for the exam, and among these professors and questions they make a selection.....sometimes these professors reveal the questions before the date of the state exam. Or they give students thirty questions to prepare ahead of time at home.]

(L. Jean Pierre, personal communications, 2003-2004).

Regarding the national curriculum, there is a collection of curriculum documents "...called "Programme Détaillé" by the Ministère de l'Education Nationale, Institut Pédagogique d'Haïti, one for each grade of primary school, six volumes in all, very comprehensive and detailed curriculum, with hours to be devoted to each subject matter" (de Verteuil, 2005, p.1). On the other hand, the reform of the 1980's did not get so far as to submit a new curriculum for the secondary level. "A curriculum that secondary teachers have been using at that [secondary] level, although everybody in the field attests of its old and obsolete content...that document is known as "Contenu Notionnel du Programme de 1972 Renové" [1972 Renovated Program of Contents Notions]" (Barthelemy, 2005, p.1).

During my time observing in Haitian public schools, I must admit that I was extremely critical of both the curriculum (such elements of it as I observed) and the pedagogical methods employed by the teachers. Later, I became more aware that we American teachers have certain learned, embedded assumptions about what 'education' should be or look like, and that other cultures do not necessarily share our beliefs, nor should we necessarily expect them to. One thing I made note of was the contents and quality of the basal readers used to teach the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, of which I bought copies. There are two basal readers per grade – one in French and one in Creole. Here

are excerpts from my comments in my notes: “French-language reading textbook: "Pour Lire Avec Plaisir" (Lecture en 8ième) Numéro 3, Editions Henri Deschamps, PDLC-47 B/02 Collection F.I.C. (reader for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year of primary school). Note observation: The reading book cited above, used as the French reading textbook, is full of higher-order-thinking questions, and the exercises are very 'whole language' in nature. Contrast with the Creole-language reading textbook: "M'ap Li ak Kè Kontan" Nimero 4, par Marie J. Manoly, LRRCR-19D, Collection F.I.C., Editions Henri Deschamps (reader used in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades as the Creole-language reading text). Note observation: In the Creole reader, there are lower-order-thinking questions only. They are all searches for facts or citations that are present in the reading passages. There are also many grammar exercises, and also French-to-Creole and Creole-to-French translation-of-sentences exercises.” (Pichard, observation notes, 2004)

The following is a longer excerpt from my notes during the time I was observing a third-grade Reading lesson at l’Ecole Carrius l’Hérisson in Port-au-Prince, and it touches on the same issues of levels of thinking skills expected of the children (or not expected), and also of the children’s lack of engagement. “The teacher is now asking comprehension questions (the ones that are in the reading book on the next page right after the passage) aloud to the whole class. She is just reading the given questions aloud to them from her book. About half the class is inattentive. The teacher repeats each question several times. Then she is furnishing answers aloud to these questions she asks. (She seems not to really expect answers from the kids?) The teacher is telling them the answers, really. She is asking and answering her own questions. My feeling of unreality increases by the second – she is conducting the lesson perfectly placidly, as if she were

teaching it all to herself alone and expecting nothing from anyone else. The children's involvement is incredibly minimal in this room. These are third-graders. The teacher's read-alouds of the questions in the text are in a rather artificial tone and an exaggerated French manner of pronunciation. She asks not a single question of her own devising. She asks no extension questions or follow-ups. All of the questions given in the book, but two, were factual knowledge, low-level on the thinking skills range, and the information could be found directly in the text (**if** the students could read it, and/or **if** they knew how/where to look back). The other two questions demanded a bit of analysis in thinking – 'why'-questions whose answers were not immediately factually stated in the text. No students attempted to answer these, anyway. Few students participated or were engaged actively overall during all of this lesson. I thought it was a travesty of a reading lesson. No one did any reading except the teacher." (Pichard, observation field notes, 2004).

I have a copy of a 4<sup>th</sup>-grade test from l'Ecole Nationale Carius L'Hérison which, all on one long typed page, in French, combines and tests the children on the following seemingly-random test-elements, in random order: a) social groupings and category-words and their authority figures (ex: city, community, school, church, family, associated with mayor, parents, preacher, etc.); b) geographical and other features of 'Saint Domingue' [the Dominican Republic] (ex: provinces, hills, plains, names of the skin colors of the people living there); c) vocabulary of specific types of small boats; d) reasons for school and for government/the state to exist; e) vocabulary words and their definitions from these domains – tree-cutting and tree-planting, slaves and escape from slavery, general work-related words, and rum-making-factory words. (Yes, rum-making!) The test keeps jumping from subject to subject and back, and through various

types of tasks (fill in the blanks, circle the correct answer, matching elements by drawing lines, explain in a sentence, complete the sentence, etc.) I find this test to be quite an extraordinarily disorganized document, no matter how I try to fight against my embedded assumptions about organized (non-random, useful and sensible) education, and to remain 'neutral' as an ethnographer. Although I can read the test, I cannot understand the test. What domain, what content or subject-area does it purport to be testing the children on? What are its organizing principles?

An American educator who works as a volunteer with teachers' professional development in Haiti contributed the following, "A person I met said that in her English class, which she takes at the graduate law school in Jérémie, Haiti, as a requirement (she is fluent, lived in Montreal most of her life) - she scores badly. It is because she has to fill in the blanks [on tests] with random words they were supposed to memorize from a text. For example, 'On the street corner there was a \_\_\_\_\_ which did not look well.' Dog? Cat? Child?..." (J. Miksic, personal communication, June 2005). The dependence on memorization is such a striking feature of any level of Haitian curriculum, as opposed to MAKING SENSE.

The poor tend to view education more as a means of escaping poverty than as a means for learning. "The issue of the external efficiency of secondary education is not as easily addressed in Haiti as in other developing countries. Secondary education has grown dramatically in response to social demand, not in relation to anticipated manpower requirements for the persons who will have secondary-level diplomas. Schools have responded to the social demand for education with programs almost exclusively concerned with further academic study. Moreover, the issue of external efficiency is

complicated by the fact that secondary education in Haiti prepares an unknown (but large) number of young people for employment outside the country” (Improving the Efficiency of Educational Systems Consortium, 1987, p. 626). The expansion of secondary education in Haiti has clearly occurred with a great amount of external inefficiency with respect to national economic needs and possibilities for employment. “Haiti’s people are definitely in need of an education, but the real problem is that there are no jobs available for people who are well-educated in Haiti. After someone is educated, they don’t want to do labor-oriented jobs, so these people remain sadly unemployed” (Scott, 2004, p.1). Conditions of education and of future employment being what they are, “The generation of 2000 will always have one thing in mind: “to leave Haiti” (Védrine, 2005, p.1).

Although it is by no means clear what **would** help in the face of such bleak employment opportunities, clearly, a classical curriculum like that followed in Haiti is not much help to the members of its society, where the relevance of such a curriculum presents a huge disconnect with their daily realities. But whatever the apparent irrelevance of subjects like Latin and French medieval literature or linear algebra, and the apparent uselessness of rote memorization, it is difficult to measure the extent to which ‘any’ general education in Haiti, no matter of what specific content, furthers the students’ abilities to benefit from further training, either in Haiti or in the diaspora host-countries. The secondary-school curriculum ‘should’ address topics which are of use for future citizens of a Third-World country, such as environmental conservation, modern science, health (including baby and maternal health, STD’s and HIV-prevention), home finances, the water cycle, money budgeting and financial transactions, governmental principles,

reading comprehension, etc....but currently it does not. The secondary-school curriculum 'should' expand and consolidate literacy skills that may have been shaky at the end of primary school; yet, most of the Haitian students we receive in my high school area are testing, even after several years in Florida, as having reading comprehension on between a second-grade and fifth-grade level.

Many Haitian people stress to me that the content of the education is irrelevant to success in the present Haitian economy. What counts more are the appearance of going to school and getting some kind of a diploma, showing determination, energy, ingenuity, and family connections. (They are saying, in effect, that it doesn't matter what the students learn, as long as they are seen to be going to school.) Assumptions in Haiti are quite different from Americans'. "Most surveys and interviews indicate that Haitians prefer for their children to be educated in French, but such feelings are only a function of their awareness of the current structure of Haitian government and commerce, in which proficiency in French is needed to advance" (Lawless, 1992, p. 149). In Haiti, a student's final exit from the secondary-school system is not assumed to be certification or diploma, based on attendance for a set number of years. The desired outcome is criterion-referenced, demonstrated proficiency on the set of competencies examined by the Baccalauréat exams. It is not expected that every Haitian student in Haiti can or will achieve these competencies. This leads me to wonder even more about the expectations of Haitian parents in my local area with regards to their children attending Floridian high schools, parents who are themselves relatively uneducated. What do they think we are doing, what do they think their children are doing all day in school? Do they assume that their children are continuing to memorize and recite their daily lessons in each

course, as they have done for so many generations of classical curriculum in Haiti? Do they assume that memorization (of ‘something’ – and if so, of ‘what’?) is the key to passing our state standardized exams? We are not able to get the local Haitian parents to attend our efforts at information sessions regarding these topics, in spite of our numerous attempts at invitations for numerous sessions over a period of two years.

Entry into secondary education in Haiti follows high social demand. The necessity of accommodating high enrollment within the constraints of available resources, and keeping the costs within the reach of family income, generates a de facto assumption that many students will receive only ‘some’ education. Thus, Haitians’ assumptions about secondary education are: widened access to more people, de-selection of less capable students, and desired results from performance on the Baccalauréat exams, attainable only by a few. Passing the last (second) Bac exam assures a student the ‘right’ to a seat in a university, although there are by far not enough seats for everyone who passes the Bac, since the ratio of seats to applicants is about 100 to 3000.

The State University of Haiti in Port au Prince is the major institution of higher education, and there are also a few private “faculties” [universities or colleges], both in the capital and in the larger provincial cities. These private “faculties” are often devoted to one subject-area, such as the private faculty of engineering, the private medical school, the private college of agronomy, etc. Haiti’s main university faces poverty, violence, and a long line of students eager to attend. It is very popular in Haiti for students of the middle-class and lower/working-class to rise in status by studying to become engineers, agronomists, teachers, mathematicians, lawyers, doctors, dentists, technicians, and other white-collar type professions. But there are some doubts to be shed on their real mastery

of certain of these subject-matters, given the heavy emphasis on rote memorization of knowledge rather than practical and useful application of their curricula. I know one Haitian engineer who, although he can do difficult problems in higher mathematics, is unable to distinguish between the concepts of “volume” and “weight” when discussing the best method of shipment of items by container to Haiti.

For many poor Haitians, the State University, which is free, represents their one shot at a better life. A college degree is a prerequisite for government jobs, usually the only professional positions available to poor Haitians. College graduates also have a better chance of getting visas to work or study in the United States or Canada. As a result, competition for seats at the State University is fierce. “Nearly 10,000 students vied for 2,000 new places last year. The university, whose different departments are scattered on campuses around the capital and in several other cities, is so disorganized that administrators gave widely varying enrollment figures; estimates of total enrollment ranged from 10,000 to 15,000 students” (Lloyd, 2005, p.2). The main campus, in the heart of the capital Port-au-Prince, has the look of an untended farmyard. Chickens roam freely under groves of banana trees. The courtyard is trash-strewn. The cafeteria, a dusty patch of ground under a plastic tarp, offers plates of rice and beans for 70 cents to those who can afford them. The campus is also a bastion of political activism.

“The State University of Haiti’s annual budget of \$7.4 million is barely enough to cover salaries for its 800 professors, of whom just 60 are full-time. The little money for equipment and maintenance comes from donations. Most of the international aid agencies in Haiti are more concerned with combating hunger and violence than with supporting higher education” (Lloyd, 2005, p. 4). Currently, there are about 100 Master’s



degree students, who are pursuing degrees in population studies, development, and computer science. The State University offers no Ph.D. programs, but does have a medical school. “It’s not a real university. There are no libraries or labs. The concept of a university professor doesn’t even exist here. It’s like a side job” (Lloyd, 2005, p.4). With the few full-time professors earning a meager \$1,000 per month, the university has trouble finding instructors at all.

There are inefficiencies to be found throughout the Haitian system of education. The most important on the secondary level is a curriculum overloaded with too many subjects to memorize, most of them irrelevant to daily or workforce realities. This alone is detrimental to effective learning in a situation where the subject matter is foreign to most students, classes are too large, textbooks are too expensive (or unaffordable, or non-existent), and few linguistic, cultural or literate support mechanisms are available at home to support students’ learning. The literacy rate of the Haitian parents (of the Haitian adolescent children I have been teaching in these last few years) is particularly low in the South West Florida area, generally ranging from ‘illiterate’ through about a fifth-grade elementary education, with some parents being exceptions in the secondary-level-educated range and beyond, of course. The free public-school access, free transportation and free/reduced lunch situation in Florida delights these Haitian parents. But they don’t understand why so many of their children are not passing the state exams.

## Haitian Immigrant Students in the USA

Findings from a Harvard study of immigrant children suggest that a high proportion (85%) of these children experience a separation from one or both parents during the migratory process. This study also found that 35% of immigrant children experienced separation from their fathers for more than five years. Given that 20% of children in the United States are growing up in immigrant homes, we know that substantial numbers of children are being affected by the separation phenomenon. Data were derived from the Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation Study (L.I.S.A.), an interdisciplinary and comparative study designed by the Harvard Immigration Project to document educational attitudes, academic engagement, and outcomes among recently arrived immigrant youth (Suarez-Orozco, C., Todorova, I., and Louie, J., 1991). As regards my own study more specifically, the same study found that the circumstances of migration for Haitian children and adolescents imposed a family disruption during migration in nearly all cases (96% of cases). Nearly half (49%) of the youth respondents in the Harvard sample were separated from both parents sometime during migration. Separation from both parents was most likely to occur among the Haitian families (59% of cases). 86% of Haitian respondents had experienced a separation from their fathers during migration. 69% of Haitian children lived apart from their mothers for a time. When separation from the father occurs during family migration, it is usually a very lengthy or permanent one. These lengthy separations were particularly prevalent among Haitians (71%). Children who left both parents behind in their country of origin to join other family members, or who came to the U.S. with one parent (leaving the other behind in country of origin)

reported higher levels of depressive symptoms. Children often experience migratory separations as painful, and complications in family relationships and family dynamics often occur. In South Florida, only 16% of Haitian children live with both of their parents, 46% live with Mom alone, 22% live with Dad alone, and 16% live with other guardians (Herns-Marcelin, 2003). Haitian parents who are separated from their children (often for many years) feel that their sacrifice (financial or with living arrangements) on behalf of their children continues their relationship and cannot be considered as abandonment.

The effects of the separation may be minimized if the child is cared for in the parent's absence in a supportive environment, if the parents and caretakers cooperate and are in regular communication, and if the child can make meaning of the situation. Many teenagers come to join parents that they have never lived with previously, or have not seen in many years. This causes complications in family relationships, has implications for the mental health of immigrant students, and often contributes to school drop-out or underachievement. Parent and teenager may have been separated for a very long time. The parent does not know the child well, which is contrary to the usual school-counselor belief that a parent knows a child best. Parents and teens have idealized expectations about the reunion. Parents may not address issues behind the long separation. There may be resentment and lingering feelings of abandonment on the part of the children/youth. Parents may have started a new family in the U.S., with new little half-siblings for the teen to get to know. Parents may have experience raising younger children, but never adolescents. The teenagers may not accept their parents as authority

figures. Teenagers and parents may be used to a different kind of parenting relationship, the previous primary caretaker may have had a different parenting style.

Haitian parents and their youngsters do not have access to their former extended family to assist with family problems. “Both the support of the community and the constraint of neighborly intervention are less constant in urban immigrant communities than they were in Haiti” (Ballenger, 1999, p. 30). The Haitian family is well-known for its strictness, so teens may look outside the family if they remain alienated from their parents. Haitian parents typically do not joke or ‘fool around’ with their children, nor wish to be friends with them; a certain level of formality and parental-authority-at-all-times marks their relationship. Haitian parents generally think that love and respect are due to them from their children, because of the innate relationship itself, and do not consider the idea that these emotions of family feeling and love grow out of contact and/or intimacy.

Many Haitian people think that it is the family’s responsibility to be strict, not to indulge their children, to make sure they act right and work hard. There is such a strongly held, shared value system as concerns discipline among Haitians, that it is a common experience for Haitian children to be reprimanded by people they do not know. (My experiences in 2004-2005 in the adult ESOL night class, hosting many Haitian children there with their parents, bears this statement out. All of the adults present in class were constantly rebuking any and all of the Haitian children present.) School personnel may not be aware of the family situation, separation or reunification issues; or they may make judgments about these issues once they become aware of them (Suarez-Orozco, C., Todorova, I., and Louie, J., 2001).

Although the Haitian father does not always live with the mother and his children, there is generally a man in the household – the mother’s father or brother or cousin or second husband – and this man frequently takes some responsibility for the children in the home. He is certainly free to ‘censure’ (or even beat/whip) the children when they are naughty. Haitian fathers are usually highly responsible for their children financially (food, clothing, school tuition and fees), and fathers who do not take responsibility for their children are highly censured by the greater Haitian community both in Haiti and in the USA. Problems often arise when a father who re-marries in the United States brings to this country the children he had fathered in an earlier marriage in Haiti. The children born in the U.S. of the second marriage already speak English, whereas the older ones often don’t, or are much less competent in the language. “If the recent arrival is a girl, she is expected to do considerable work for the family. She may be expected to forego educational opportunities, and she may be poorly treated” (Ballenger, 1999, p. 25). There are situations (I know of at least one in Fort Myers, and I’m sure there are many others) where the Haitian adults do not realize that by keeping a care-giving child home from school with the young ones, they are breaking a U.S. law. This would not have been illegal in Haiti, where the older children in families are generally expected to care for the younger ones.

Growing up in an immigrant family has always been difficult, as individuals are torn by conflicting social and cultural demands while they face the challenge of entry into an unfamiliar and frequently hostile world. The process of growing up or becoming American oscillates between smooth acceptance (rarely, in the case of adolescent Haitians), and traumatic confrontation. In the case of Haitian adolescent immigrants,

they are “subject to conflicting pressure from parents and peers, and to pervasive outside discrimination” (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p.74).

When Haitians “attempt to recreate Haiti on foreign soil” (Buchanan, 1979, p. 307), Haiti still provides the ideological and behavioral reference points for them in the U.S.; United States society does not. However, attempts to maintain the Haitian class system in Florida/ the USA do not work as well any more, because there are new possibilities for social mobility of Haitians from lower-class and working-class backgrounds. These new threats to the old system are “through increased access to the symbols of status and prestige (possessing material goods, going to college) and by changing standards for the evaluation of status and prestige” (Buchanan, 1979, p. 307). Social and economic mobility are also increasingly dependent on possession of the English language, which further breaks down the old Haitian class system. I have heard many complaints from educated middle-class or working-class Haitians regarding the ‘Haitian upstarts here in Florida who think they know everything just because they can speak English’. So first-generation immigrants from Haiti (in general, the parents of my students) have to re-adjust their frames of reference to accommodate themselves to their children’s new status-markers and standards of interpersonal assessment. They are learning together what are the “proper credentials” to present themselves with, i.e., cultural, behavioral, and linguistic features perceived as superior to those of black Americans, which do bring tangible or intangible benefits from white American society (example: jobs, or the perception that Haitians are hard-working employees), while not evoking too much resentment and hostility from African-Americans and Hispanic-Americans.

In the U.S., the structure of economic opportunities has changed. Previously, there were many and diversified labor requirements that immigrants could do and still remain part of the working class. Such opportunities have increasingly disappeared. “This process has left entrants to the American labor force confronting a widening gap between the minimally paid menial jobs that immigrants commonly accept, and the high-tech and professional occupations requiring college degrees that native American elites occupy (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 76). The gradual disappearance of intermediate opportunities affects the first-generation immigrants’ (parents) economic progress as well as the second-generation immigrants’ (children and adolescents) expectations. Haitian parents may be strongly oriented toward preserving a strong national identity, and with social networks promoting individual success (remember that everything is seen as in reference to life and structures in Haiti), but in trying to instill national pride and an achievement orientation in their children, they clash with the youngsters’ everyday experiences in school in the U.S.

Speaking first of Miami, Haitian adolescents attend predominantly inner-city schools. The physical distance is not very far, and Miami Haitians’ attitudes, behaviors and mores heavily influence South West Florida – i.e., Fort Myers-based and Naples-based Haitians. “In many respects Little Haiti [in Miami] serves as an economic and cultural center for Haitians throughout Florida. By contrast, the Haitian population in Fort Lauderdale [and West Palm Beach] is viewed as a more established Haitian community, with second and third generation Haitian-Americans and a higher overall economic class than in Little Haiti” (Labissière, 1995, p. 101). Fort Myers and Naples in the south-west of Florida make up even newer, more recent Haitian communities. Miami Haitians

consider Fort Myers people to be living as *moun an deyo* [people on the outside]. In other words, Miami Haitians consider the Haitians in Fort Myers to be living in the boonies, outside of all sophistication.

Native-born youth in high schools make fun of Creole and of the Haitians' accents. Haitian teens find themselves torn between conflicting ideas and values: to remain totally Haitian they would have to face social ostracism and continuing attacks in school; to become American (black Americans) they would have to forgo their parents' dreams of making it in America on the basis of ethnic solidarity, education and the preservation of traditional Haitian values. "An adversarial stance toward the white mainstream is common among inner-city minority youths, who, while attacking the newcomers' ways, instill in them a consciousness of American-style discrimination. A common message is the devaluation of education as a vehicle for advancement of all black youths, a message that directly contradicts the immigrant parents' expectations" (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 81). Some Haitians try to hide their ethnic identity by cloaking it in black-American cultural forms. Assimilation in this instance is not into mainstream culture but into the values and norms of the inner city. "As the Haitian example illustrates, adopting the outlooks and cultural ways of the native-born does not represent, as in the past, the first step toward social and economic mobility but may lead to the exact opposite" (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 81). It would appear that many Haitians, through their segmentary assimilation choices, will remain confined to the ranks of the lower and lower-middle classes both economically and socially.

While Haitian newcomers may have (or may have had) pride in their Haitian origins, they have (or have had) little or no mechanism for convincing their African-American



and other peers that Haitians deserve respect. Most of 'school culture' devalues what Haitians value(d) or accomplish(ed). Speaking more than one language (Haitian Creole and French) is/was inconsequential if one can/could not speak English. Being well-dressed in French styles was/is too 'sissy' or too 'fancy' for American high schools. Being respectful and passive towards teachers was/is inappropriate for the majority culture schooled in rather outspoken American ways. When they are a minority, Haitians cannot combat these negative interpretations of their culture. Only within the narrow confines of student culture can African-American and other peers (inner-city youth, 'gangsta' culture) exercise power. When numbers of Haitians increases, the power of their peers to affect them and their styles of assimilation diminishes. (Stepick et.al., 2003).

“In the 1980's, Miami Haitian community leaders deemed jobs and a secure immigration status as the most important needs in the Miami Haitian community. In the 1990's, Miami police apprehended increasing numbers of Miami Haitian youth, and Miami Haitian gangs emerged. In the 1990's, therefore, the same leaders identified their concerns over the future of Miami's Haitian youth as the number one community priority” (Stepick, et.al., 2003, p. 132). Here in the Fort Myers area, on the western side of Florida, on the Gulf Coast, across Alligator Alley from the larger Haitian community, we are behind the times. It would be fair to say that all three of these areas of concern – immigration status, jobs, and youth achievement -- are uppermost in the minds of area Haitian community leaders. So far, though, unfortunately, leadership itself is a scarce commodity in the Fort Myers Haitian population.

There are three forms of adaptation into a new culture/country such as the USA. One of them is to slowly acculturate and integrate into the (white-like) middle class. A second leads to permanent poverty and assimilation into the underclasses; a third associates rapid economic advancement with deliberate preservation of the immigrant community's values and tight solidarity. But this last is difficult to accomplish; if simultaneously the adolescent Haitians are experiencing discrimination and/or a lack of success at school, peer pressure, and the feelings that their parents are too strict and too old-fashioned (and too lacking in English language skills) to adapt 'correctly' to this new country, it is logical that they will make a choice to associate with their black American and already-assimilated-Haitian peers. Portes and Zhou (1993) report three features of the social contexts encountered by today's newcomers that create vulnerability to downward assimilation: **prejudice against skin color**; **location** in cities/urban areas with high concentrations of urban poor minorities; and the changes in the host economy that lead to **an absence of occupational ladders** for mobility. The service sectors in which so many Haitians work (restaurants, hotels, supermarkets and shops) seldom offer channels for upward mobility. Even when parents of immigrants are moving ahead economically and their immigrant children have no objective reasons for embracing a counter-cultural message, the process of socialization (into segmentary assimilation) into the urban/poor/adversarial subculture may take place, since their physical location, their streets/neighborhoods and their schools expose immigrant Haitian children and youth to marginalized native youngsters coping with their own difficult situations, poverty, underachievement, lack of prospects, etc.

The following trends affect Haitian (and other) adolescent immigrants adversely: increasing difficulty and requirements for getting a high school diploma; state and national standardized testing both for exiting-high-school and entrance-into-vocational/technical centers purposes; increasing costs of higher education; difficulty of entrance requirements to get into colleges and universities; immigration/legal status difficulties; and of course, the perennial one for immigrants, problems with acquiring the English language to a certain level of reading/writing/oral/aural functioning. “Children of immigrants must cross a narrow bottleneck to occupations requiring advanced training, if their careers are to keep pace with their U.S.-acquired aspirations. The trend forces immigrants today to bridge in only one generation the gap between entry-level jobs and professional positions that earlier groups took two or three generations to travel” (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 85). In the case of young Haitians in Florida, their community members are often too poor to render assistance. Contemporary Haitian adolescent immigrants attempting to incorporate into American society find a society and locales “combining official hostility and widespread social prejudice with the absence of a strong receiving community....the existence of a large but downtrodden coethnic community may be even less desirable than no community at all” (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 87).

Haitians in public schools, according to Portes and Zhou’s 1993 research, which was done in Little Haiti in Miami, have parents who rank lowest of any immigrant groups on the dimensions of education of their parents and status of their parents’ occupations. Haitian teens do have consistently high aspirations for themselves, which often contrast with the wide differences in parental socioeconomic backgrounds and the effects of institutional discrimination, and which, furthermore, are often unrealistic, given the

difficulties of standardized testing requirements that they face. Majorities of Haitian youths reported having been discriminated against, and about 20 percent said that discrimination was by their teachers. “Congruent with these personal experiences, Haitian teenagers are more likely to agree that there is racial discrimination in economic opportunities in the United States” (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 95). Options have become less clear for Haitian adolescents in the contemporary context of segmentary assimilation and their choices of which section or stratum of American culture to emulate. They may not even have the opportunity of gaining access to middle-class, mainstream (“white”) society, no matter how acculturated they become. Joining the native ethnic circles to which they do have access may prove to be a ticket to permanent subordination and disadvantage. Joining black American (often urban poor) circles may lead to an adversarial stance to the mainstream culture and/or a devaluation of educational achievement. Persisting in assimilation attempts towards mainstream American society, while keeping their goals of economic and social status betterment ‘straight’ in their minds, but without well-educated parental support and encouragement, is a difficult balancing act for most Haitian teenagers to be able to carry out successfully in the face of constant peer pressure.

Many Haitian adolescents, if they were socialized in the U.S., care very little about Haiti. When all of their friends are in the U.S., they have no strong emotional ties with the island. The youngsters remember Haiti vaguely, and they learn from their parents, friends, newspapers, and teachers or other adults of the poverty, current events, and political situation on the island. More recently-arrived Haitian adolescent immigrants remember Haiti very well, and care very deeply about Haiti’s fate, political situation,

chaos, deep poverty and difficulties, as well as for their extended families remaining back home. In the same familial niche, as time goes on, parents and children may be developing two different views of the United States – as a place of transit and as a place of permanent residence – which reinforce the misunderstandings between them. Haitian youth begin bringing home American friends, while their parents associate almost exclusively with other Haitians and continue speaking Creole as much as possible. Haitian youth begin speaking more and more English at home. “Because of their knowledge of English, the teens must often be cultural brokers for their parents, translating for them and interpreting the wider society to them” (Laguerre, 1984, p. 77). The authority of Haitian parents over their teenagers loses ground. Because the parents often cannot speak as good English as their children, they cannot always discipline their youngsters, who must also serve as their interpreters. The parents end up consulting their children for advice. Frequently one can hear Haitian parents complaining that their children – raised partially in the U.S. – have bad manners or are ‘in bad company’ [*mauvaise fréquentation*]. These complaints are symbolic of the parents’ inability to control them as totally as they would have done in Haiti. Haitian parents are afraid that their teenagers will leave their homes for good, or will report them to the police if they discipline them severely or corporally as they would have back home. (Actually, this scenario does happen a lot, where Haitian females [especially females] call 911 to complain of mothers, fathers, older brothers or other relatives beating them in attempts to control their behavior. Then it’s the relative who gets in trouble with the law, and the teen who gets removed to a shelter by the Department of Children and Families.) So overall, the power dynamic of Haitian households has shifted tremendously, with serious

consequences for both the kids and the parents. Due to their better knowledge of English and the country's laws, Haitian children and adolescents frequently control the home's telephone, the mail, the front door-bell, any and all communications from or to school or other offices and authorities, etc. This makes the adults feel powerless, and this reversal of their roles and upheaval of the natural equilibrium and authority/power is psychologically disturbing to both generations. But the economic need and "the turmoil associated with adaptation often leaves parents little quality time to spend with their children" (Labissière, 1995, p.45).

Haitian adolescent immigrants, in addition to experiencing the trials of adolescence, often feel a sense of loss and confusion when they are forced to leave their homeland. Like all adolescents, they are engaged in identity formation, but unlike many other groups, they demonstrate ambivalence about their identity in relation to race, language, and pride in national origin. Haitian adolescents speak of eight themes which define their sense of identity: pride; isolation; prejudice; parental strictness; nostalgia; belonging; family; and career vision (Colin, 2003). And according to Labissière (1995), Haitian-American adolescents' ethnic identity status may fall along developmental stages, since they have to resolve a number of issues over time: stigma (depending on region and prevailing climate, some degree of stigma may or may not be attached to being Haitian), multiple and conflicting categorizations (Haitian, Haitian-American, black American, American), racial discrimination based on skin color, and language barriers. Some models of identity-formation allow that individuals can have strong ethnic identities that are in harmony with strong mainstream identities. Phinney (1990) identifies four possible outcomes of bi-ethnic identity-formation, as follows: 1) 'Acculturated'

individuals have a strong identification with both the ethnic group and the dominant group; 2) 'Assimilated' individuals have a strong identification with the dominant group and a weak association with one ethnic heritage; 3) 'Ethnically identified' or 'separated' people have a strong ethnic identity; and 4) 'Marginal' individuals have a weak identification with the dominant group as well as the ethnic group. Most Fort Myers Haitian youths exhibit mostly acculturated styles outwardly, dressing in popular 'hip hop' fashion, sporting trendy black-American hairstyles, listening to American rap music, speaking with accompanying [learned] exaggerated hand-gesturing and body language, generally acting 'ghetto', etc. Newest young arrivals from Haiti become the low group on the totem pole until they learn how to dress, speak and act in this acculturated way.

But interestingly and conversely enough, "In Miami [and in South West Florida], the relationship between African-Americans and Haitians can be characterized as ambivalent at best and hostile at worst. Blacks regard Haitians as yet another group of foreigners threatening to displace them in the job market. Furthermore, many African-Americans feel that Haitians are completely oblivious and insensitive to their own struggle against racism, and that Haitians look upon them solely as the most socially and economically disadvantaged group in America" (Labissière, 1995, p. 46-47). There are reciprocal negative attitudes held by Haitians, black Americans, and other Caribbean groups. Also, anecdotally, I can report that area Haitians often consider native African-Americans to be "lower-class" or "vulgar" or "poorly-brought-up, mannerless" compared to themselves. There are conflicts in the workplaces that they share, conflicts intrinsic to the work, but with an ethnic tinge. These are usually conflicts that would happen regardless of the participants' immigrant or American background, but these conflicts become interpreted

by themselves and others around them as ethnic or newcomer-vs.-American conflict. Occasionally the ethnicity of Haitians does motivate the conflict, and “language is commonly the flash point. Language is a metaphor, an emotionally charged emblem of identity and power that easily antagonizes Americans” (Stepick, et.al., 2003, p. 99). As Labissière says, “For their part, Haitians tend to perpetuate stereotypes about African-Americans: that they are lazy, on welfare, violent, etc. Haitians perceive that African-Americans are the most stigmatized and downtrodden group in the U.S., and, consequently, many Haitians actively avoid being associated with them. They perceive African-Americans to have little or no economic clout” (Labissière, 1995, p. 47).

If Haitians’ goals are mostly about economic and social-status betterment, and access to economic opportunities in the U.S. is controlled by whites, Haitians prefer to associate with whites. “Haitians depend on whites to broker their access to resources, e.g. visas, sponsorship, housing, jobs, etc.” (Labissière, 1995, p. 47). Because Haitians perceive themselves as having so little to gain from associating with African-Americans, even though in outward appearance they emulate their ‘styles’, they tend to emphasize aspects that distinguish them from African-Americans: Haitian language, culture, style, accent, food and history. But there are sharp generational differences, and the adolescents lately do not follow their parents in this regard, but tend more and more to ‘style themselves’ in native black urban ‘rapper’, ‘ghetto’ looks and postures. These culture clashes produce tension in the home and educational difficulties. It is difficult, if not impossible, for a Haitian (more often than not limited English proficient) student to posture being ‘ghetto’ all day long and still get A’s and B’s in all of his/her high school classes.



In relation to the positionality inherent in the identity-formation struggle of Haitian adolescents, Labissière claims that “There is a pervasiveness of this rhetoric of authenticity, and ...cultural markers such as clothing and hair styles serve as the currency for the authenticity struggle” (Labissière, 1995, p. 107). He also observes that, “Any behavior can have ethnic attributions depending on who observes it and how they are positioned on the racial ethnic continuum. The pervasiveness and insidiousness of these pressures propels one to constantly engage with or reflect on the charge “you are not ‘blank’ enough”, in order to prove or justify your membership to the group” (Labissière, 1995, p. 108). Anecdotally, the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade Haitian youth that I teach are constantly having conversations about their relative “Haitianness” or lack thereof on any given day. They seem to be verbally engaging in thrashing out and weighing and re-evaluating the relative merits of Haitianness, Americanness, or a mixture of the two, and how “being” or “acting” any of the above is useful or relevant to them personally or as a group. But Laguerre comments on this same theme, “Instead of seeing the youngsters as having one identity, it is more accurate to see them as *performing the identity* that is most suitable to the situation they happen to be in” (Laguerre, 1998, p. 154). The objective reality of Haitians speaking Creole brings their position as a minority within a minority to the forefront of our collective consciousness. Sometimes Haitians stress their problems as a black people, sometimes as an ‘invisible’ or ‘oppressed’ immigrant ethnic population, and sometimes as an exploited Third World people, depending on the situation. I have witnessed various male Haitian students ‘playing’ these different ‘identity cards’ in high school, with teachers or with disciplinary deans, when they get in trouble.

There is a discrepancy between the role American schools expect parents to play in their children's education, and the role Haitian parents are realistically able to play. Many parents cannot help their children with their homework because they are not fluent in English or they are not well-educated themselves. They simply cannot take the active role that the school and society expects them to play in the education of their children. Schools in Haiti do not expect parents to be involved; the parents are asked to leave the education of their children to the instructors and school administrators, who have professional knowledge, skills and experience. Haitian parents almost always believe that the "people at school know best". Then, too, very often Haitian parents are hindered by their own language barriers. Those who are not able to express themselves in English are ashamed to attend school meetings, and some fear being ridiculed or dismissed by others. Some Haitian students are ashamed to bring their non-English-speaking parents to school, or ashamed of their old-country appearance or "backwardness", and all communications between the school and the parents are usually mediated by the students. Parents who are not here legally may decide not to participate in school affairs lest they be reported to the INS (having no knowledge of our laws protecting the line between school and Immigration, this is a valid line of reasoning for them). Single parents and parents working two jobs (in the Fort Myers area, these two categories seem to account for at least 90% of Haitian parents) have trouble finding time to take part in school activities. The Haitian home environment often presents a tactical problem for the student who would try to do well in school. When many members of the extended family live in cramped apartments, a student has no quiet place to study. The flow of music, conversation, television and Creole radio programs and news broadcasts is not conducive

to the necessary concentration for studying material in English. Also, in order to help their parents financially, many high school aged Haitian students work many hours during the school year.

### Involuntary Immigrants, Minorities, Underachievement

The decision to migrate is usually an adult one. Where children are part of this migration, they usually have little choice but to go along with the decision of the adults. Typically, they are informed at short notice that they will be migrating. They are not usually part of the process, particularly as concerns decision-making, until shortly before the time of the actual movement. Little or no attempt is made to prepare them for the new social or economic or academic environments, so in general children are often hopelessly under-informed about the move itself and about the implications for themselves. The language situation is not highly considered either by the adults with pressing political or economic reasons to emigrate. In the case of Haitians going to the U.S. or another country, traditional Haitian society in any case puts no importance whatsoever on the opinions or desires of children and youth. They are simply expected to be obedient to the wishes and decisions of their elders in all respects. Furthermore, the children are not expected to “make a scene” or “become recalcitrant” or “become a problem” after the immigration move, either. As they did not share in the decision-making to leave, they do not share in the problem-solving in the early stages after arrival in the U.S.

In addition to the issues of involuntary immigrants, there is the question of longer-term involuntary minorities, and in the case of Haitians, these two topics mesh or overlap. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggest that “black people have expressive responses to their historical status and experience in America” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 176). High-achieving black students feel some tensions when they strive for academic success. “Students are pulled by their dual relationships to the indigenous black fictive-kinship system and the individualistic, competitive ideology of American schools. The characteristics required for success in [American] society contradict an identification and solidarity with black culture” (Fordham, 1988, p. 54). Black children learn the meaning of ‘fictive kinship’ from their parents and peers while they are growing up. It appears that they learn it early enough and well enough so that they even tend to associate their life chances and ‘success potential’ with those of their peers and other members of the community.

Because the individualistic, merit-based, competitive ethos predominates in the school context, black high achievers often make choices that either put social distance between them and their peers, or undermine group solidarity, or attempt to hide their high achievement (both hide their behaviors towards it, and hide their success level). Many of the successful black students find themselves juggling their school persona and their community persona in order to minimize the conflicts and anxieties generated by the need to interact in/with the various competing (and tension-producing) arenas. “Racelessness appears to be a pragmatic strategy at the level of the individual. Racelessness among black adolescents may be influenced by gender, with the female high-achieving students appearing to be more willing to be closely identified with the

values and beliefs of the dominant social system than their male counterparts. When compared with the female students, the high-achieving males appear to be less committed to the cultural system of the larger society and far more confused and ambivalent about the value of forsaking their indigenous beliefs and values” (Fordham, 1988, p. 81).

These comments of Signithia Fordham’s are borne out by what I see in the immigrant Haitian community of adolescents as well. Within the school structure, within the school day, black adolescents seem to sense that they have to give up aspects of their identities and their indigenous cultural system in order to achieve success as defined in dominant-group, “white” terms. Although this observation can be generalized to the Haitian community, particularly the males, they are not able to articulate their thoughts or intentions about this. All they know is that they are constantly watching each other and commenting on each other’s behavior and appearance. To quote Fordham, “Unfortunately, this constant surveillance of the behaviors of members of the school community – both high- and under-achieving – drains the energy of students which might be devoted to the pursuit of academic excellence and other creative endeavors” (Fordham, 1988, p. 81). There is a tension between those who do want to succeed and others who insist on “highlighting group-sanctioned attitudes and behaviors” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 186). Students who do want to do well in school must find some strategies to relieve the tension. Many underachieving students have not succeeded in finding strategies to relieve these tensions in a manner that enhances academic success. In my present study, the focus group students themselves comment on this area of tension in Chapter Five.

“In an atmosphere of discrimination, intolerance and mutual distrust, involuntary minorities come to experience formal schooling not only as irrelevant, but worse. There is an affective dissonance. Rather than viewing schooling as a ladder for upward mobility, certain disparaged minorities experience schooling as one further tool of the oppressor to maintain the equality of the status quo” (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991, p. 42). Members of disparaged involuntary minorities respond to inequality by formulating conceptions regarding the educational system that further remove them from investing in schooling as a way to a better tomorrow.

Involuntary immigrant minority students were brought involuntarily into a subordinate relationship with the dominant group of their present societies, and subsequently treated to a history of denigration, exclusion and unequal educational and economic opportunities. This history has direct bearing on the perceptions, interpretations and responses to schooling of the Haitian students and their families. Some involuntary minorities see the acquisition of academic learning and skills in the majority culture not as an additional set of skills to be drawn upon as appropriate, but rather as a symbol of acquiescence to the dominant group and its values (and inequalities). They may view acculturation as a subtraction process leading to the replacement or even rejection of their ethnic cultures and identities. “Immigrant and involuntary minorities alike are disturbed by conformist pressures in school, by the disparagement of their home cultures and by the job ceiling that inhibits their economic advancement” (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991, p. 367).

Several variables have been singled out to explain the school performance of the immigrant youngsters in the American educational system: language differences, cultural

expectations, class backgrounds, ethnicity, voluntary versus involuntary migration, racial discrimination and personal motivation. Ogbu (2003) and Gibson & Ogbu (1991) distinguish the posture of the involuntary immigrants from that of the voluntary immigrants and propose that only the latter have the proper attitude to succeed in school, because they see school performance as a ticket to upward mobility. In households where French and/or Creole are spoken, usually Creole, the student is called upon to participate in two different speech communities, and the period of adjustment to the educational milieu will depend on the youngster's level of motivation and previous schooling experience. "Schooling leads to the production of new diasporic citizens, less oriented toward the homeland but more interested in building up their future to live a successful life in the United States" (Laguette, 1998, p. 145).

The relations of the youngsters to the homeland, Haiti, come directly or indirectly to the fore in their participation in the school system. Schools represent the intersection of the migrational values held by the parents, the previous schooling the youth received in Haiti, and the influence of their teachers and their peers in their new school program. The success of the Haitian diasporic community depends heavily on its ability to educate its children and youth. The reproduction and re-positioning of the Haitian community in the American system is tightly tied to the successful outcome of the schooling of the youngsters. It takes a rare young Haitian person to overcome the prevailing peer pressure and institutionalized discriminations in order to keep focused on his academic goals. "There is evidence that their fledgling success is rooted in deliberate attempts to disassociate themselves from the stigma imposed upon the black populations in the United States through an affirmation of their national identity and their religious fervor"

(Fernandez-Kelly & Schaufler, 1994, p. 675). But a growing number of Haitian youth are showing up in alternative schools, detention centers and penal institutions. “Haitians do not have alternative referents in their familiar environments [neighborhoods, schools]. In those circumstances, the choices are clearly bifurcated: either conscious attempts at self-distinction, or yielding to the norm through conformity. Insular and destitute environments can rapidly translate conformity into socioeconomic stagnation or decline” (Fernandez-Kelly & Schaufler, 1994, p. 675). The conflicting pressures create a tortured self-identity for Haitian adolescents.

It is heartening that many Haitian immigrant students appear to interpret the economic, political and social barriers against them as more or less temporary problems, problems that they can overcome with the passage of time. They do see education and language acquisition as a way to get ahead. They see acculturation in an additive rather than in a subtractive light. “They do not assume that school learning will lead to an erosion of their identities and cultures but rather will enhance their ability to participate in both the larger society and in their ethnic communities” (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991, p. 367). But Haitian students need to understand the relationships that exist between educational effort and educational outcomes, between educational credentials and future jobs and incomes. Haitians who rediscover Haitian pride have prevailed over prejudice and pressures to become multicultural, multilingual individuals.



## Education of Haitian Adolescents in Florida

Most Americans do not recognize the distinctions that Haitians draw among themselves, and perceive Haitians as both an ethnic and a racial, unified population. (Putting them all in the same boat, so to speak.) In South Florida, various estimates put the Haitian population at anywhere from 165,000 people to 280,000 people. Usually they are speaking of residents of the East Coast of Florida (Miami, North Miami, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, etc.) with those kinds of numbers. How many Haitians live in the Fort Myers area in Southwest Florida? According to U.S. census figures, more than 4,500. “But Pierrette Faustin, program director for the Haitian Center of Catholic Charities in Fort Myers, has said she suspects the population is twice as large. Many Haitians are reluctant to be counted because of their immigration status, she said. Many in Lee County’s Haitian community are newer arrivals” (Wadsworth, 2005, p. B2). The older, more established and more socially/professionally stratified Haitian communities of the Miami area, the Boston area and the New York area, have far more residents – in the Boston area it is in the nature of 75,000, and in the New York area in the ballpark of 250,000. “They say that roughly one-third of Boston’s public-school seats are filled by Haitian children” (Downs, 2004, p. 2).

Locally, and without hard data, I have heard demographic estimates from Haitian community members mentioning as high a population as 16,000 Haitians in the Fort Myers area, based on the number of independent Haitian churches and businesses that this community locally supports. It is likely that fully half of these Haitian people (whatever the true number) are here overstaying a tourist visa, i.e. ‘illegally’. This means

that they entered the U.S.A. legally on nonimmigrant visas, but had a “*permis de sejour*” [permit for a stay of a certain length], and they did not return to Haiti when that time was up. Many Haitians confuse census-takers with Immigration officials and refuse to cooperate. Many Haitian adults and teenagers in this area are working illegally (this means that they do not have the right to work in this country, they do not have a work permit, they do not have a “green card” [legal resident alien card], they are not even in the process of getting their paperwork or legal status with the INS). Their legal status, “being legal” here are very big deals and major topics of conversation among the adolescents in my high school ESOL classroom (among Haitian and Hispanic immigrants alike). One popular euphemism for this state of illegality is “S/he doesn’t have a Green card yet.” Although in the spirit of *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982, I have never inquired of a student what his/her immigration status is, the students speak fairly freely about their concerns about ‘not being legal’ and about whether they have the ‘right to work’ (or not – in which case they often do work, but are paid cash under the table, or they work by using someone else’s social security number) in the relative intimacy and atmosphere of trust of my classroom setting. [In *Plyler v. Doe*, 1982, the Supreme Court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits states from denying a free public education to undocumented immigrant children, regardless of their immigrant status, and that school systems are not agents for enforcing immigration law.] “Haitians have settled throughout Lee County from Bonita Springs to Cape Coral. But the heart of Lee County’s Haitian community can be found along Fowler Street between Colonial and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. boulevards in Fort Myers” (Wadsworth, 2005, p. B2).

School culture in the USA is significantly different than in Haiti. Haitian students are educated in a context in which the teacher provides considerable direct guidance and commands. The teachers come out of the same linguistic dynamic as the students, and consequently are well-placed to negotiate the French-Creole linguistic complex that is the Haitian classroom. Creole speakers are the dominant majority in the classroom and therefore intra-student communication is also facilitated. When the Haitian students migrate to a context in which they are a significant minority, and the target language is English, one would anticipate considerable difficulty. Success in education is premised essentially on the ability to interact in a positive way within the education system. Under normal circumstances, this would involve the development of appropriate linguistic behaviors for the contexts in which the students must now operate. For many, linguistic security is the first requirement for integration into any community. Most Haitian adolescent students make every effort to try to learn functional English language skills as rapidly as they can; however, they are not used to considering “how” best to learn, and have experienced very little formal development in Haiti of learning-to-learn or thinking-about-learning (metacognitive) strategies and frames of reference.

The English-language problem (being limited English proficient [LEP] or English Language Learners [ELL] students) is seen as paramount, which has blinded teachers and administrators to the class distinctions and previous schooling experiences of some of the youngsters of the Haitian milieu. The adjustment to the American school system entails several transitions: from an emphasis on rote memory to understanding and reasoning; from viewing the teacher as authority figure to viewing the teacher as a helper or facilitator; from strict school discipline (including corporal punishment) to a more

relaxed environment; from a homogeneous peer group to a balkanized student body based on ethnicity; and from the use of French or Creole to the use of English as the language of instruction in the classroom. The Haitian students come from a very stratified system, and their success may depend on their position in that hierarchical scale. There are those who attended the best schools in Haiti and speak/read fluently in French as well as Creole. For them to be part of the new American high school student body (and its frequent stigmatization of Haitians) is a distinct psychological 'step down'. Others attended poorly equipped schools, with very limited access to materials and resources, and furthermore whose schools' schedules were interrupted by closures, political turmoil or street violence. These can be considered as students who have experienced Interrupted Formal Schooling or Interrupted Formal Education (IFS or IFE). Another group of Haitian students, those from poor families, had no opportunity to attend school while in Haiti, or their teachers (often in rural areas) did not themselves have more than a secondary diploma, and these can be considered as students with Limited Formal Education (LFE). From time to time we also receive Haitians students who are completely illiterate in any language.

There has been some growth among educators in their level of consciousness of the need to address the linguistic comprehension issues, but attempts to address the linguistic issues seldom focus on the perspective of the students themselves. The language problems that might be predictable or readily observed from an adult perspective (often 'reading comprehension in English' issues come to the fore at the teacher/classroom level as well as at the administrative or school-district levels) might not be the ones to which the students themselves have any real sensitivity, and vice versa. Adolescent students are

highly interested in pronunciation issues, with the goals of bettering their own pronunciations of English and reducing their own accents (these attempts can “improve” but not “eradicate” foreign accents). These young immigrants clearly develop a range of coping strategies. They try to save face. They are often silent in classrooms. Or they spend their time in classrooms interacting, socializing and playing exclusively with Haitian peers and speaking exclusively in Creole, to the annoyance of their teachers. That behavior is part of the strategy of opting out; not participating in academically-oriented classroom activities so as not to run the risk of being ridiculed. But not to participate is inimical to language development. When they can, Haitian teens superficially ape and imitate what is an “American” accent, which often sounds like a black Ebonics accent. Acquisition of these superficial features of oral language seem to bring some comfort and face-saving to the immigrant adolescent Haitian who can manage to transform his Creole accent to such an accent. It is difficult to explain how it is more psychologically comforting or externally face-saving to a Haitian youth to sound like an African-American speaking Ebonics while reading on a third-grade level when s/he is in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, than to sound like a Haitian (with a Haitian foreign accent) reading on a third-grade level in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, but such is the case. “With few exceptions, peer pressures among middle school and high school students were described as having a negative effect on students’ academic striving. This was particularly true of black males” (Ogbu, 2003, p. 192). This is 99% true of Fort Myers area Haitian high school males, in my observation, but perhaps only 50% or less true of Fort Myers Haitian high school females.

English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs and bilingual programs for Haitian students (where they exist), by and large, are not well-integrated into the schools' 'community' (unless there is a very strong teacher-advocate and/or administrator-advocate in place), and are seen by some faculty as below average. Since their activities are supposed to provide a transition to the mainstream, the ESOL programs are assumed to be not on a par with the mainstream programs of instruction. On the micro-level, secondary school administrators and/or teaching faculty are rarely aware of, or evince the slightest curiosity about, the degree to which the ESOL English classes are aligned (or not) to the mainstream English Language Arts and literature classes. "Mainstream teachers are not very supportive of the program. Some bilingual teachers felt that mainstream teachers are afraid of the Haitian students, that they have little interest in the bilingual program, and that they do not provide the same level of assistance to Haitian students as they do to those in the mainstream" (Laguerre, 1998, p. 151). Teachers often perceive low performance of Haitian students as uniquely related to their language difference. Also, many Haitian students have limited role models and limited knowledge of the roles available to them.

Bi- and multi-cultural students typically view the ESOL room as a safe haven, a second home. They are somewhat marginalized in their mainstream classes; their languages and lived experiences are sometimes devalued; the mainstream teachers sometimes view the ESOL rooms as content tutoring centers; and the ESOL curriculum "did not help the students acquire the academic proficiency required for meaningful, comprehensible completion of tasks in their mainstream content courses" (Sharkey & Layzer, 2000, p. 353). Sharkey and Layzer define two terms: *academic resources* refers

to people, practices, and physical items that facilitate a student's academic success; and *academic success* is the achievement of or progress toward the students' desired career goals. Social contexts can construct unequal access to the resources necessary for success. One question for teachers is how to provide a balance of affective support and cognitive challenge to LEP students (such as Haitian adolescents) in ESOL and other classrooms. For Haitians (and all LEP students), there needs to be a balance in high school of teachers' expectations of students' mastery of skills and knowledge (the kind that can be measured on standardized tests), an effort at acculturation and integration (with the support of students' affective needs that that entails), and acknowledging that the students are 'trying' by completing their given tasks/assignments and putting forth effort.

Sharkey & Layzer (2000) wrote that "...the ELLs were being denied access to academic success and resources (even though the denial was cloaked in a discourse of well-meaning concern). When schools equate success with level of comfort rather than with the meeting of students' affective and cognitive learning needs, those schools foreclose students' opportunities for learning" (Sharkey & Layzer, 2000, p. 365). I take Sharkey & Layzer's article as a warning for us locally to keep a balance in our addressing of the various needs of our Haitian students: cognitive, social, cultural, and linguistic.

For teachers who do not share their culture, Haitian students are often (or seem to be) difficult to control. Cynthia Ballenger deals with these classroom-management issues at length in her book (1999), points which I will attempt to summarize. American teachers have a tendency to frequently refer to internal states of emotion, and to articulate these not only for themselves but for their students. Haitians, on the other hand, in their

‘control talk’, “...emphasize the group.... They articulate the values and responsibilities [and rewards?] of group membership. The Haitian teachers emphasize what the families have in common, their desire that the children respect adults, that the children behave properly, and that their behavior not shame them” (Ballenger, 1999, p. 35-36). Haitian teachers are also more likely to condemn all bad behavior, not in terms of consequences as Americans would do, but simply as ‘bad’. Americans frequently explain the consequences of particular actions as if we were trying to convince the child that there was a problem with the behavior; we engage in cause-and-effect thinking aloud with the students. Americans also generally think of reprimands as put-downs, and we are reluctant to give them. But Ballenger observed Haitian teachers with Haitian students, and realized that the Haitian children share the adults’ understanding of what bad behavior is. They do not need to be ‘convinced’, the children already have indisputable prior knowledge that their behavior is/was wrong. In Haitian culture, reprimands are confirming. Haitian teachers do not use cause-and-effect, pragmatic ‘control talk’, they use the intimacy of caring through rhetorical questioning ‘control talk’ about shame and responsibility to the group, the family, or to the Haitian or human community. Haitian teachers use rhetorical questions with students to which the answers are assumed to be known, questions which emphasize the fact that the children already know that their behavior is wrong. Haitian students can even answer these questions in the typical classroom style of ‘choral unison’. The Haitian students are also frequently urged to be good “for those who love them”, because “the people who like them want them to be good” (Ballenger, 1999, p. 36).



Americans perceive Haitians as too severe, both verbally and in their use of physical punishment; on the other hand, Haitians often perceive American children as being extraordinarily fresh and out of control. “Haitian immigrant parents here are both ashamed and defiantly supportive of their community’s disciplinary standards and methods” (Ballenger, 1999, p. 39). Haitian parents expect uncompromising obedience and respect. They feel that Americans do not emphasize shared values or a sense of moral community enough with youngsters. The typical Haitian view is that one is supposed to act right, whatever the circumstances.

The schooling of immigrant children becomes problematical because diverse representations meet at this one site: the views of the school system, the teachers, the parents and the community, and the students are not identical. Schooling becomes a process of negotiation. “The weighting of parental expectations, especially where unaligned with detailed knowledge of the educational system, is problematic” (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991, p. 123). Each person or sector has their own point of view, and rarely does “anyone” understand the points of view of any of the others simultaneously. This is perhaps particularly true for the Fort Myers Haitian community, where there are very few persons with a ‘global understanding’ of the different interests and stakeholders’ positions and frames of reference (the teachers’, the school’s, the district’s, the Haitian parents’ and the Haitian students’); there are very few “cultural negotiators” in place in the school districts – the persons who most nearly and often fill this role, to the best of their abilities, are the Haitian adults working in schools as paraprofessionals.

In the 2004-2005 school year, there were some 1,000 Haitian children registered in Lee County (Fort Myers area) public schools. In Collier County (the Naples area), there

are approximately the same number of Haitians again, with a similar socioeconomic portrait. In the high school of this study alone, there are over 110 Haitian adolescent students, the largest group of any high school in Lee County. About 80 of these are students with an LY status in the ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) program, meaning that their English-language needs are such that their status is active, and they are being served with teachers who are ESOL-endorsed, through daily accommodations for their cognitive comprehension of content subjects, their L2 learning, and their assessment measures. Another 20 Haitian students are LF status (former limited English proficient, now in a two-year monitoring period); and roughly another 10 to 15 students (or more – there are some second- or third-generation Haitian students who we don't even know about) are permanently exited from the ESOL program and are now LZ's.

One of the most powerful predictors of educational attainment is family socioeconomic status (SES), which contributes directly and indirectly to “success”, through its effects on variables like hours spent on homework and children's aspirations. The relative advantage or disadvantage associated with specific immigrant communities not only remains after family SES is controlled, but interacts with the school contexts experienced by first- and second-generation children. On the other hand, the negative effects associated with disadvantaged ethnicity are most apparent when students face the stiffer academic competition of schools outside the central city. “Many Haitian parents saw themselves locked in combat with the surrounding inner city, whose influence on their children they vehemently denounced. To overcome this influence, they either tried to move to the suburbs or sent their children to Catholic or suburban ‘magnet’ schools.

Poverty and the powerlessness of their ethnic community thwarted most of these efforts. The effects of disadvantaged ethnicity follow Haitian children who manage to leave inner-city schools” (Portes & Macleod, 1996, p. 270). The factors that account for this have to do with the human capital that Haitian immigrants bring with them from their country of origin, and the social context that receives them and shapes their adaptation in the United States. “In 1990, less than a third of Haitian immigrants had become U.S. citizens, and less than half owned their own homes – figures that are well below the mean for foreign-born persons” (Portes & Macleod, 1996, p.261).

The first important result of this educational and social context is the large difference in average scores on academic tests. Portes & Macleod (1996) report that Haitian students’ scores were quite low relative to their total sample and to the median scores for their respective school systems. With regard to standardized reading scores, the entire sample fell below the national median. Reading scores in the South Florida sample followed an identical pattern, with school SES increasing average test scores. “The lower-than-average reading score for the entire sample is attributable to lingering difficulties with English by children from non-English-speaking homes” (Portes & Macleod, 1996, p. 272). In the Fort Myers Haitian community, we are seeing the same types of results on the state standardized FCAT Reading test, and approximately 50% of our Haitian students are not getting high school diplomas because of it (data is from 2003, 2004 and 2005 school graduations).

Over the past decade, there has been a quiet evolution; after years of denying their Haitian roots, an increasing number of Haitian teens are embracing them. “Some of it is tangible: Haitian flags flying from the windows of cars, imprinted on t-shirts, transformed

into tailor-made outfits. Some of it involves attitude, as when Haitian teens pay homage to Haitians' accomplishments" (Charles, 2003, p.1). In short, kids aren't ashamed to say that they are Haitian anymore. There are different reasons: 1) an increase of numbers of positive role models among the changing demographics have clearly helped Haitian teens find strength in numbers; 2) the positive influence of pop culture icons, especially the singer Wyclef Jean, who speaks a lot in public about his Haitianness and about Creole; 3) there is an increasing number of Haitian-Americans who have risen to prominence; and d) "schools have also made an effort by hiring employees of Haitian descent" (Charles, 2003, p.3).

On the less positive side of the picture, growing teenage acculturation to American society also means the presence of more Haitian gangs in Florida. Immigrant groups traditionally form gangs, post-exile, for the same kinds of reasons: feeling threatened by the host population, youth unkind to youth, etc. The risk is of gangs becoming rapidly intransigent. "Haitian gangs fear police officers less because, in Haiti, police officers often belong to gangs, assuming leadership roles and delivering kickbacks to government officials" (Krane, 2004, p.1). It is difficult to track Haitian-American gang members because they don't tend to wear colors or brag about being in a gang. According to police detectives in Dade County, Haitian gangs are increasingly active and violent, and "Haitian gangs are more aggressive because they have more to lose, they're motivated by the financial part of it" (Krane, 2004, p.2). In the 1980's and 1990's, many frustrated Haitian youths began choosing the culture of the streets, of the urban poor models around them. These Haitian gangs are all around South Florida, moving into the west (Gulf

coast and higher into north-central Florida, as well as being quite well-established on the east coast side.

Resiliency mechanisms and coping of Haitian families are in reaction to symbolic or real oppression, deprivation, degradation, and disenfranchisement. How do the Haitian families reconstitute strength and save face in the event of growing marginalization? **“In interviewing families, it was found that most Haitian parents do not spend more than 2 hours a week face to face with their children”** (Herns-Marcelin, 2003, speech). The children have many unconventional or disruptive behaviors, and are often doing poorly in school. The Haitian parents or elders must find diverse coping mechanisms to reconstitute their strength and somehow make themselves feel better about what is going on with their children.

#1 Coping Strategy: Sending kids back to Haiti or sending kids to relatives elsewhere. This is a typical response. There are many echoes of “I wish I had not brought my kids here”, and “This is a bad environment to raise kids”. Caretakers in Haiti find the new, Americanized behaviors of the kids “bad”. Or, parents make their children undergo a displacement to aunts, uncles and cousins living in other communities/towns in the USA or Canada, France, Guyana or the Caribbean basin, in hopes that the new, ‘negative’ behaviors of the Americanized kids will change by moving the kids. The parents hope that other caretakers can provide new and less hostile environments, and get the kids to disassociate from gangs, groups, cliques and bad friends.

#2 Coping Strategy: Haitian parents develop the belief that it’s the kids’ friends that constitute a ‘bad influence’. Parents develop beliefs that it’s their ‘mauvaise fréquentation’ [hanging around with a bad crowd] that is making their own kids go

wrong.... They have beliefs that it's the fault of the peer network in the town where they are currently located. (There is almost no reflection of the rather typically American, individualistic notion of 'personal responsibility' on the part of the Haitian adolescents or their parents. The dictum *se pa fòt mwen* [it's not my fault] permeates Haitian behavior, permeates all Haitian society.) The Haitian immigrant adolescents are learning codes of the street, which oppose mainstream society and teach oppositionality; therefore, violence potentially governs the Haitian youths' interpersonal behaviors. The parents perceive the weakness of their authority over 'their' youth.

#3 Coping Strategy: Religion. 88% of Haitians say that it's 'very important'. Catholic, Protestant (Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Seventh-Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witness, etc.), and voodoo are the main ones.

#4 Coping Strategy: Providing material goods to the kids. For example, buying them expensive brand-name clothes and sneakers, gold jewelry, cell phones, having their hair and nails done often professionally, buying them larger or better furniture (such as bedroom sets), or even letting the kids have the larger bedroom of the home. Quote from parents: "I want her to stay with me and away from her bad friends". Every expensive wish is given. Immigrant Haitian parents lower their own SES to "please" or to "contain" their children. They are giving in to their children, but they are having to work more and more to accomplish this and to pay for all their kids' needs; therefore, they see their kids less and less! They express ideas like "I am giving them love".

#5 Coping strategy: 'Washing their hands' of their teenagers and throwing them out of their homes. I personally know of at least three cases of this in the Fort Myers area, where minor children (students of mine) have been thrown out of their parents' or

guardians' homes and left to fend for themselves, and my Haitian paraprofessionals tell me that there are many more cases. Two of them that I know of are males (one very assimilated, and the other one not assimilated and not even speaking much English) and one is a very-assimilated female. The two males (high school students) both now live with non-family members, usually Haitian widow ladies, paying rent for their room and board. Neither of the males are doing well in school. The female currently lives with her boyfriend's sisters and does considerably better in school than the males.

Haitian adolescents are caught between the systems – they are espousing conflicting values (materialism vs. education). Societal institutions are promoting their development but underachievement. The societal influences include: schools, neighborhoods, juvenile justice system, law enforcement, and media/pop culture. Kids feel that they are going through this adaptation to a new culture and values alone. The kids are left on their own (without adult supervision) here in Florida way too much, sometimes not seeing an adult member of their household at all during their school-week. If a problem behavior arises and persists, parents should examine all aspects of situations. But the Haitian parents are poorly trained/equipped/educated to do so, and unlikely to seek help outside their families. In Haiti, corporal punishment is accepted, but in America, it's called child abuse. There are four common types of punishment that Haitian children in Haiti suffer: a) whipping with a belt; b) forced long-term kneeling; c) endless copying of sentences; and d) whipping with strips of cow-skin tied or braided together (the *rigwaz*). There is a very widespread acceptance of corporal punishment in Haiti. But many Haitian parents have discovered that without guidance on proper parenting, in Florida they can lose a child to the state's welfare system. Language and cultural barriers often make it difficult

to tap into basic social services available. The Haitian state does not get involved with how parents rear their children, and laws that protect women and children from slavery and abuse are not enforced. Haitians practice a very swift and physical discipline, and the rationale or framework for this is that children have no rights. Here, many parents see children removed from their custody because they thought they were doing what's right in disciplining their children. Haitian parents need training in other problem-solving techniques with their kids, for instance, such as taking away toys, bikes, TV time, or sweets, or putting children in time-out in their bedrooms or grounding them for a few days.

Haitian youth, becoming alienated from their parents, are finding positive identities in the American youth culture, with its set boundaries and ranking. Deviant behaviors are manifesting themselves: inclusion in the transnational drug culture, crime and criminality, gang formation, etc., and unfortunately, less than half of the youth are graduating from high school. At Edison High School (in Miami), the student body is 93% of Haitian descent, but 83% of those are on Levels One and Two of the Reading FCAT (not passing it and not getting high school diplomas). Haitian youths' experiences are very different from their parents, so there are contradictory reactions to living in Florida. There is a need for equipping Haitian parents with knowledge about their children's assimilation processes. A few solutions for these social problems have been suggested by researchers:

- pro-social peer activities which keep kids busy/productive/interested
- role models within the support networks
- monitoring by adults



- education to prevent specific problems
- examination of specific problems for prevention within social service or support networks

Most if not all of the latter solutions can be implemented in after-school programs especially geared to Haitian teens.

Haitian professionals (educators, assistants, etc.) working for the school system – in their “plays of identity” (their ‘Haitianness’) – could be acting as “cultural brokers” to intervene for illiterate/uneducated parents. Haitian staff members could be bringing causes, concerns and questions to the school districts or school buildings, but often they do not wish to rock the school’s or district’s boat. Most Haitian assistants in schools do their jobs and keep a low profile. But their identity does cause Haitian staff members to bring concerns of the schools to the Haitian homes, usually because they are ‘ordered’ (told/asked) to do so. (This is a one-way street communication...) In a similar vein, Haitian kids have no idea of the correct uses of the hierarchy systems in place in schools, the courts.... Usually, whenever my students have a problem in school, no matter what kind of problem it may be, they bring it to myself or to one of the Haitian paraprofessionals. They have little or no idea of the job responsibilities and domains of influence of guidance counselors, assistant principals, principals, teachers, etc.

Haitian parents are VERY afraid of the immigration situation/discovery of their illegal presences. Teenagers sometimes threaten their parents and play on their fears of discovery. Frequently, there are not enough trained /educated Creole-speaking adults available for mediation and translation between parents and kids, or between parents and schools. Fortunately for my particular set of high school students, we have two excellent

Haitian paraprofessionals in place at my school. Schools, sociologically speaking, are reinforcing the mainstream values and Haitians are living within a system in which they “cannot find themselves” – schools’ paradigms are not reinforcing multiculturalism (as values or as a system) nor the possibility of “biculturalness”. There is a danger of “pathologization” of the Haitian youth culture, especially as these youth turn more and more to exclusively materialistic goals or ‘gangsta-rappa’ styles of physical appearance.

South Florida’s Haitian community tunes in to Creole-language radio programming, because the majority of them prefer to get their news and information from television and radio programs. Radio dominates in Haitian communities, because most Haitians rely on the oral tradition, and radio is popular because the shows are less expensive to produce than television. Radio hosts of Creole-speaking shows increasingly include English-language content in their programming, and interview guests in English, in hopes of reaching out to younger Haitian-Americans. There seems to be a strong generational difference between younger Haitian-Americans, who primarily listen to English-language radio, and their parents, who prefer programming in Creole. Most radio hosts feel that “the Haitian community is continuously changing, and new Haitian refugees will always depend on Haitian radio for news about their country” (Monnay, 2004, p.2). But we must notice also that the reference point continues to be HAITI, not the U.S. It would be good if local Haitian radios would announce and talk about issues related to education (in Florida), to parental involvement (in Florida schools), scholarship information nights, parent trainings, educational workshops, summer programs and summer camps for students of different ages, after-school programs, etc.

There is a series of comments by a Haitian educator in the Boston area who feels that Haitians (as a community) are acting like big fish in very small ponds, that they are too materialistic, that they invest in material goods such as cars, houses, designer outfits and jewelry at the expense of thinking seriously about education and especially higher education. Nekita Lamour says, “Let my fellow Haitians know that having a nice car, a house, or being seen by a group of Haitians in church or being heard on the radio is not a final accomplishment. The world still sees us as poor black folks. We need to collectively strive to get ourselves out of that image, as a group. By being visible or audible in small Haitian circles, we think we are leaders, but we are not” (Lamour, 2004, p.2). Lamour also talks about “others” (other immigrant ethnic communities and their behaviors) and says, “I notice they have their own people looking out for the resources that this country offers and bringing them to their own community, [whereas] the brain drain that Haiti has suffered is not serving the diasporic community” (Lamour, 2005, p. 2). It is true that Haitians do seem to depend on others to have after school programs, tutoring, FCAT preparation courses, or summer camps for their children. So who IS responsible for educating the Haitian community?

‘Average’ Haitians in this area generally don’t buy books, don’t go to museums, don’t go to plays, don’t attend conferences or cultivate inquiry, don’t have a basic awareness of the arts, don’t have an awareness of the modern global or world environment, don’t travel besides going back to Haiti, and don’t interact much with others who are not Haitian (beyond the strict minimum necessary – bosses and teachers). They don’t read much in their spare/leisure time. There are a few Haitian newspapers in the United States, but these are not as numerous nor as large as you would expect to find

in a community of their current demographics. Haitians hereabouts go to the library to use the free computers there, not to borrow books. (The free computers at the public libraries in the Fort Myers area are mainly used by Haitian youth for playing computer games with no educational value.)

Haitian youngsters and their parents do not acquire, develop, and maintain the reading and writing skills which are the utmost prerequisites to attending university in this country. Many Haitians don't show interest in the printed word/ world, or in continuous learning. This lack of development of cultural literacy, or global literacy, by almost an entire community, is alarming to some concerned educators. Usually in the USA, beginning in middle school or early in high school, school students start getting involved in community services, in volunteering, in mentoring; and later it is easy for a college student to find an overseas experience, to volunteer in a Third World country. Short or long 'exchange', 'learning' or 'service' stays which permit young people to experience the greater world are fostered in most communities in the USA. Are Haitian adolescents and twenty-somethings participating in the same kinds of experiences? Are there mechanisms in place to encourage them to do so? Are there mentoring organizations available to local Haitian youth? What roles do influential institutions in the community, such as schools, media, and churches, play so that Haitian youngsters can have culturally rich learning experiences outside of their homes? How can Haitian children be inspired to learn, if most Haitians don't have the habit of buying or borrowing books, going to libraries or museums or any new places? If the religious (pastors) of the Haitian community and the radio and television broadcasting hosts don't encourage reading, given their influence on the Haitian community, what can or should educators

expect Haitian students to do in their schools? Do Haitian adults feel an outright rejection of books and print and ‘all things educational’, or are they complacent about these, or do they believe that it is only the schools’ ‘place’ to worry about these, or are they ignorant of the entire set of questions?

Individual Haitian community organizations (social or civic) in the larger cities (Miami, New York, Boston) are doing a good job providing the services that their organizations are supposed to or contracted to provide, but there is no coordination of any such thing in the smaller communities like Fort Myers. Social services and after-school (educational or other) services are hit or miss. There is no general community, city or county umbrella organization handling Haitian affairs in these smaller cities with populations of Haitians numbering around 15,000. As Lamour says though, “We shouldn’t need to go to the *Blan* [whites] to hire a qualified person to help put the community together and start creating – at least on paper – another image of the Haitian community” (Lamour, 2004, p.2). Recently I was very alarmed to see a flyer for certain social services, flyer which had come to me electronically through Lee County’s Human Resources organization (a very reputable source) list-serve, but which upon investigation turned out to be a complete scam. The flyer rather cryptically listed such services as “case management”, “referral”, “domestic violence counseling”, “outreach”, “after school” and “job placement” for the Haitian community, and purported to be from an organization calling itself “Haitian Educational Center”. But there is no such center; the flyer gives only a cell phone number; the man attached to the cell phone cited an address for this supposed Center which is actually occupied by a private Certified Nursing Assistant school; the man was unable to furnish his 501 c 3 number as a registered non-

profit organization; the man was unable to name the ‘boss’ or ‘president’ of the organization or center; and he clearly was intending to bilk the unsuspecting members of the Haitian community who went to him for “referrals” out of their cash, for social services which are actually free from the state or the federal government. This type of con artist scam is going to become more prevalent and more inventive with new rackets to prey on the immigrant Haitian Fort Myers-type communities.

### Summary

These are some of the markers of Haiti’s past and current political economy: the extreme poverty and starvation of its people; high levels of unemployment; violence, gang warfare, criminality and anarchy/chaos accompanied by an incompetent, corrupt and overwhelmed police force; an almost complete lack of infrastructure for such necessities as potable water, medical care, roads, sanitation, financial opportunity, telephones or electricity; a non-functioning judiciary system; a vestigial system of irrelevant neoclassical education, which is in tatters; a post-colonial history of a series of corrupt government administrations which are not there to serve the people but only there so that the rulers can personally get rich by exploiting the people, culminating in a current ‘puppet regime’ installed under United Nations auspices; and long-term environmental abuses such that the natural resources of the land are virtually destroyed.

Haiti’s society is noted for its complicated status and prestige issues, involving class and color but not limited to them. It is a society which is stratified by class, and populated by individuals maneuvering for their status and prestige in Haitian society

through appearance-based, sometimes superficial markers. There are areas of conflict and complex social and linguistic tensions revolving around the uses of the “more prestigious” French language versus Haitian Creole, the language of 100% of the Haitian population. Although Haitians place a high value on the concept of being an educated person, or on education itself, the current educational system in the country is disorganized, inefficient, corrupt, and dominated by costly private schools. The Haitian constitution guarantees free primary education to all, but the current illiteracy rate remains at about 55% of the population. Most schools in Haiti teach their students academic content in French, a language which is not really understood by the majority of the pupils; the educational system relies on an antiquated, irrelevant French classical curriculum and a heavy emphasis on memorization and recitation by the students at every level from primary through secondary to higher education. There is very little expectation by the majority of teachers of real comprehension, analysis, synthesis, application of theory to real life, problem-solving or critical thinking skills on the part of their students. Discipline in Haiti is severely authoritarian.

When Haitian adults immigrate to the United States, they continue to keep Haiti and Haitian social and behavioral mores as their primary reference point for interactions and appearances. Haitian people are very interested in economic advancement in the USA. Adolescent Haitian immigrants, as involuntary minorities, may experience segmentary assimilation to a poor urban oppositional subculture, or they may assimilate closer to the ‘white’ cultural, educational and career aspirations of mainstream American society. There are high levels of chronic academic underachievement among Haitian adolescent immigrants, which may be explained, besides their assimilation path, by their limited

English proficiency and /or their educational backgrounds, especially as concerns their prior reading comprehension/ literacy skills in Haiti. For high school age immigrants from Haiti, passing the Florida state standardized test in Reading on the diploma level has become a real barrier to their future success, as determined by their own goals. In this study, I am interested in what the adolescent Haitian students themselves have to say about their own perceptions of success, i.e., I am asking them to define what success means to them, and how they will get to it or appear to get to it.



## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Explanation of the Methodology

According to Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986), perceptions influence behavior; hence it has been postulated in this study that the Haitian adolescent students' perceptions are important because they give us insight into some of the reasons for their academic behavior/performance. This qualitative study examined a focus group of adolescent Haitian immigrant students in a public high school in Florida, and the factors involved in their self-perceptions of academic learning and success. In the review of the literature chapter, there is a synopsis of the factors impacting these students from their culture, Haitian society and education.

This is a study of a specific group of Haitian adolescent students in a specific public high school in Fort Myers, Florida, during the academic year 2004-2005. The researcher is the ESOL English teacher of the students. The interest was in questions surrounding and regarding the Haitian students' own perceptions of "success" and what that concept means. In the data collection phase, the focus-group students themselves were asked to tell what they thought and perceived about various questions relative to their own academic success. The over-arching central research question that was asked is, "What do the adolescent Haitian immigrant students themselves identify as their perceptions, beliefs and issues impacting their own academic success in a Florida public high school?" To review the original guiding questions which were formulated for this study:

1. What do Haitian immigrant students report that a successful student or a successful person should look, sound and act like?
2. How have Haitian immigrant students incorporated the concepts of literacy, content-area literacy, reading comprehension, and thinking/problem-solving skills into their perceptions and notions of success?
3. Do adolescent Haitian immigrant students, who have been formally educated in Haiti in French rather than in their Creole mother tongue, have certain expectations (positive, negative or neutral) for their own levels of comprehension of academic subjects in an American high school?
4. What other concerns influence the development of Haitian immigrant students' perceptions of their own academic success?
5. What other tensions, if any, do Haitian immigrant students report between Haitian societal and educational norms and beliefs, and American ones, regarding 'success'?

The list of 26 focus questions which I asked the students are to be found in Appendix A.

A qualitative study was selected because of the nature of the research question. "In a qualitative study, the research question often starts with a "how" or a "what" so that initial forays into the topic describe what is going on. Second, choose a qualitative study because the topic needs to be explored" (Cresswell, 1998, p.17). This is an exploratory study of a group of Haitian adolescent immigrant students and their perceptions and beliefs about success while they are in one public high school in one academic year.

“An ethnography is a product of research, involves prolonged observation of a group, typically through participant observation in which the researcher is immersed, or through one-on-one interviews with members of the group” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 58). Extensive observation and interviewing was done in this study, both for background-knowledge purposes and when working with the focus group of high school students.

The data sources in this study are from: a) audio-taped focus group interviews of students; b) written responses to focus-questions by 19 individual Haitian students; and c) classroom writings by Haitian students in response to specific writing-prompts. “To analyze qualitative data, the researcher engages in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach. One enters with data of text and exits with an account or a narrative” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 142).

Researchers Lincoln and Guba (1985) have identified several aliases for the term *naturalistic*: ethnographic, phenomenological, subjective, case study, qualitative, humanistic. This study is considered a qualitative ethnography. “An ethnographic design is chosen when one wants to study the behaviors of a culture-sharing group” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 39). This approach was necessary because of the relationships among the influencing factors, the students, their thoughts and perceptions, and their behaviors.

“Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Cresswell, 1998, p.15). The natural setting is also associated with Bandura’s Social Cognitive theory.

The students' verbalizations and writings (about their thoughts and perceptions regarding success) were an important part of the data collection for this study. The study has been framed within the assumptions and characteristics of the qualitative approach to research. "This includes fundamental characteristics such as an evolving design, the presentation of multiple realities, the researcher as an instrument of data collection, and a focus on participants' views" (Cresswell, 1998, p.21).

"Social research is both a process and a product. The relationship between words and worlds is anything but easy or transparent. There is a commitment to remain in touch with materials gathered in the field, such that textual claims and interpretive perspectives can be illustrated well by data collected for just these purposes. One cannot create an ethnography unless one has done extensive fieldwork" (Wolcott, 1990, p.7). It is thought that qualitative ethnography and an interpretive perspective are particularly relevant in the case of understudied populations from different cultural backgrounds, when the researcher has done long-term and thoughtful work in the field (Wolcott, 1990).

"Because there is no clear and easy route by which to confront the self who observes, most professional observers develop defenses, namely 'methods', that reduce anxiety and enable us to function efficiently. How do you write subjectivity into ethnography in such a way that you can continue to call what you are doing ethnography?" (Behar, 1996, p.6).

In this study, an exploratory qualitative method was used, beginning with 2 focus group interviews (data source A) of a total of thirty-six Haitian immigrant adolescent students, who have immigrated to the USA within the last five years. (See Appendix A for focus questions.) There was a Creole-speaking interpreter present. Individual

interviews using the same focus questions (data source B) were also conducted with nineteen Haitian immigrant students, again with the interpreter present. Those nineteen students wrote their answers to the focus questions. The focus group interviews, along with the written answers to the questions of the 19 individual students, gave a general overview of what these Haitian adolescent students say when addressing the tension among these questions regarding their own academic success. Cresswell stated that “Informant interviewing is used to learn institutionalized norms and statuses in an ethnographic approach. Interviews prove extremely valuable for uncovering the range of perceptions” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 327). In their own words, the students explain their perceptions of idealized concepts of academic behavior, as well as giving their own explanations for what they do or do not perform in school. “The juxtaposition of actual behavior and ideal behavior provides an excellent means for describing and analyzing a cultural system” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 330).

The classroom writings by the students (data source C) were based on work with reading, discussing, and writing: literature-based writing-prompts or extension-to-real-life writing-prompts drawn from and/or inspired by the 11<sup>th</sup> grade and 12<sup>th</sup> grade ESOL English Language Arts and ESOL Intensive Reading curricula. Naturally, certain works of literature are imposed during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade high school English Language Arts academic year; however, it is possible for a teacher-researcher to design writing-prompts around the area of ‘success’ within all of these. These anecdotal records and classroom writing-prompts (textual data) led to the development of themes 11, 12 and 13 in the body of the study.

The focus group interview results, along with the written-responses textual results, were used to generalize findings regarding these questions of perceptions of their academic success in Haitian adolescent immigrant students in a mid-size Florida town. The interpretations of the researcher regarding these findings are based on knowledge of the cultural/social factors influencing the students' perceptions, observations throughout the daily immersion with the students, and the reality-based measures of academic success from the students' report cards. "Interpretation involves making sense of the data, the 'lessons learned'. It might be an interpretation within a social science construct or a combination of personal views with a social science construct" (Cresswell, 1998, p. 145).

I realized as I was writing the review of the literature that a sixth central question kept coming up in my mind: Do the Haitian students maintain the reference point of 'how things are in Haiti' when they speak and write about their own success? Although I did not ask a focus question concerning this point, some of the students refer to this, although in oblique ways, as will be discussed in Chapter Five.

As concerns the results of the interviewing with the focus questions, and the students' writings in response to certain prompts, the analysis of the data collection is related in Chapter 4, accompanied by the students' own words – organized into 13 themes - in Chapter 5, with annotations, analysis and commentary by the researcher. After reviewing the textual data from the students' words and writings, the data were sorted and categorized into thirteen themes. Ten of the themes were "givens" (the themes that I expected), emerging from the focus questions asked of the students. Three other themes emerged "on their own" from the students' writings and spoken words because

they did not fit into any of the ten predetermined themes or categories. These three additional themes could not be combined into one single category because of their disparity. Although all 19 students in the final focus group were interviewed with all 28 focus questions, in the dissertation writing, different students comment on different topics. All of the students have pseudonyms in this study. Some of them may be here illegally, possibly for years, having ‘overstayed’ their short-term non-immigrant (visitors’) entry-visas, but this is not my business to know.

All of the students in the final focus group emigrated from Haiti within the past 5 years, with a range of arrival-dates represented, from a minimum of 17 months here in Florida, to a maximum of five full years. Their arrival dates in Lee County schools were checked on their registration documentation and the dates on their Home Language Surveys, all of which information is present in the students’ cumulative records folders. Although the cumulative records at my school are available for any teacher to look at, I am very carefully aware of the need to preserve the anonymity and privacy of the students who took part in my study. The preservation of my students’ anonymity is not only an ethical duty, the law, and their absolute right to have maintained; it is also very much in my heart to grant them this measure of respect and protection.

Through anecdotal records and conversations with Haitian adults and teenagers, this researcher believes that many of the high school students responding to the focus questions are actually older than the age on their ‘school’ birth certificates. Apparently, many Haitian parents who send for their children to join them from Haiti, cause fake birth certificates to be created for these children while they are still in Haiti. It is quite easy to obtain any and all fake documents that one wishes in Haiti, since corruption is so

rampant, and even to have them look like the ‘real thing’ with official-looking stamps and signatures from the *état-civil* office, and everything else that one would desire to have appear on a document. The purpose of fake birth certificates is to have the children appear younger, appear to be well under 18, so that they still qualify for free public education in the United States. The goal is for these students to be able to attend American high school for at least two years so as to get an American secondary diploma, and to learn English full-time for free. Free and reduced-price lunch and free transportation might also enter into the making-them-younger idea, given the social and economic realities in Haiti. I have no proof, but have had many, many conversations with Haitians on this topic. Often the fake birth certificate is only used for school registration/entry; the real age of the person is used for his/her social security card (if s/he is eligible for one), at the Immigration hearings, and at his/her job. The high school students, when they refer to this discrepancy in age at all, do it very obliquely, for example they would say, “There is a mistake on my date of birth on my passport” or something vague like that. They would never admit that the ‘mistake’ is on the birth certificates which were presented to the school district for registration and grade-placement purposes, much less that this ‘mistake’ was willingly and knowingly caused. There is no proof, but through conversations, I believe that some of the Haitian high school students’ real ages at graduation (in past years) were as much as 25 or 26 years old.



## Background of the Researcher

In addition to my work in the realm of education, and my volunteer work in the Haitian community, I have had to learn to think and observe like an ethnographer and a cultural anthropologist in order to produce this study. “How was the present produced? What is the present producing? What part of the activity being observed will be durable, and what will disappear? Conjectures about the future thus become an important part of the understanding.” (Falk-Moore, 1987, p. 727). Perhaps in this case, I cannot use the word ‘conjecture’ as effectively as I would use the word ‘worry’, for it is not the least part of my subjectivity as concerns these Haitian immigrant students that I ‘worry’ about their futures. Yet I understand with Ruth Behar that I cannot allow myself to “identify so intensely with those whom we are observing that all possibility of reporting is arrested, made inconceivable. It has to persuade us of the wisdom of not leaving the writing pad blank” (Behar, 1996, p.41). My commitment to social justice and my compassion for LEP students / immigrants / Haitian adolescents must be balanced by scholarship and thoughtfulness, so that my insights are arrived at in a manner which permits me to share them unashamedly with the larger community.

“Some of us have been propelled out of institutions; some of us have remained within, fighting for change. We have searched for a moral vision that is not abstract but interpersonal, with a complexity that does not paralyze, and a tolerance that is not an abdication of responsibility” (McCarthy-Brown, 1985, p. 75). I am one who remains by choice within an institution or system, fighting for change (or for social justice) and true equity for students of all backgrounds. Although I believe that “all is not

right with the world” when it comes to the education of secondary limited English proficient students in the state of Florida, I prefer to try to effect change from within, and the best path seems to be to examine, describe and analyze the phenomena I observe. I have noticed the difficulties that the Haitian adolescents face when they are in public high school in Florida, and surmised at first that these difficulties were due to the mismatch between their home-country educational system and ours. The difficulties of any and all teenage LEP students facing new language acquisition for academic and social purposes is further complicated for the Haitian teens by the fact that the language in which the Haitians are instructed in schools in Haiti is not always their real home-language. The more one learns about Haitian society, however, the more one comes to think that there are other factors at work also influencing these students as to what their ‘final result’ (success or appearance of success) should look like.

“An important part of a research project is asking where the research questions come from in one’s own life, why it seems important, what its value is to the teacher-researcher” (Ballenger, 1999, p. 32). I have been working with adolescents and adults learning the English language for most of my professional career (24 years), and watching and trying to comprehend their various struggles. My research questions began germinating five years ago, when I did not understand why the Haitian teenagers’ classroom struggles seemed to be so much more challenging than those of other teens who immigrate here from other countries. I began wondering and reflecting as to how the Haitian students functioned metacognitively, if it seemed different from the other teens I served and taught, why this was so, how I could help or serve the Haitian students better, what ‘else’ did they need to acquire in school besides the English language skills

(such as learning strategies), what it was that they really wanted to achieve, etc.

Ultimately, I needed to begin to seek the reasons for the apparent mismatch between what we do in high school in Florida and what is done in Haiti, and the results of the students' home educational background on them as learners. This apparent mismatch potentially has results on them as attainers of success, as well. My questions and searches led me to social and cultural research bases in Haitian Studies as well as 'purely' educational or linguistic ones. "Do their social goals support their learning or derail it, or are they irrelevant altogether to the academic curriculum?" (Ballenger, 1999, p. 41). I will go a step further than Ballenger when I ask, Are Haitian students' perceptions of success (or the appearance of success) irrelevant to the academic curriculum?

The teacher-researcher is a white female in her forties, with 24 years of experience teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages in New York, Florida and Switzerland. I am completely fluent in French, due to my 18 years living and teaching in Switzerland, and I have a working knowledge and an intermediate functional comprehension of Haitian-Creole, which I learned through intensive course-work in Miami and later through my volunteer work with Haitian community groups locally, and of course from listening to my students day in and day out. I have visited Haiti ten times over the past three years. Working most of my professional career with adults and adolescents in the realms of ESOL, ESL, EFL, and mainstream English, I have been teaching ESOL at 'Marsh' High School for five and a half years at the time of this study. I have been teaching in this same school district (Lee County) since the fall of 1998. At various times I have taught middle schoolers, adults, and high school freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors in ESOL English classes. During the year of this study, I was teaching 11<sup>th</sup>

and 12<sup>th</sup> graders in their grade-level ‘English III through ESOL’ and ‘English IV through ESOL’ classes, and one section of ‘ESOL Developmental Language Arts’ level 4, containing 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, where making improvements in reading comprehension was considered to be the main focus of the course. These ESOL classes had a mixture of Haitian, Hispanic, Brazilian, Russian and Asian students. About half (or more) of the students in each class were Haitian immigrants. During the year of this study, there were two Haitian adult men, both in their early thirties, functioning as ESOL paraprofessionals at ‘Marsh’ High School, interpreting and translating in various content-area classes for the students speaking Creole.

### Setting

“There is a realization of the socially constructed nature of all realities. I find cross-cultural work helpful in tuning down the normative voices that numb my mind and fog my attempts to make sense out of the world in which I live” (McCarthy-Brown, 1985, p. 68). Working in an American public high school (in any county, in any state) can be very “normative”, in the sense that we of the teaching and leadership community tend to formulate common goals in the environment (learning, methodology, strategies, quality, discipline and management, control, standards and benchmarks, assessments), we tend to want to transmit and perpetuate American culture and value-systems, and we tend to view concepts such as “success” in similar ways.

For this study, the research set is bounded by place (one particular high school), by participants (one teacher, two paraprofessionals, and specific Haitian LEP students), and

by time (Fall 2004 through Spring 2005), with one classroom as the setting. I will call the school “Marsh High School” as a pseudonym. According to the information on the school district website, Marsh High had a total enrollment of 1955 students in school year 2003-2004 (the last year for which complete information was available). We usually begin each school year with over 2000 students on campus. From the end of school year 2003-2004 to the school year 2004-2005, the year of my own study, there were no significant changes in the demographics of the high school or the school district. The high school’s demographics are: 38 % minority students, 62% majority (white) students; 9.8 % non-Gifted ESE, and 12.6% Gifted students; 12.8% of the high school’s students were in the ESOL program; 35% of the high school’s students receive Free or Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL); and the mobility rate is counted as 31.2% (School District of Lee County Home Page, 2005). The County website also informs us of the following:

“Our School District is the 60th largest district in the United States and we proudly educate over 71, 000 students. Unlike many U.S. urban districts, Lee County's population continues to grow at a rapid rate. The reason for this continued growth is obvious - Lee County's 475,000 residents live and work in an attractive environment. Exotic trees and plants flourish in the subtropical climate, and local waterways support a host of fish, birds and other animals. There are beautiful waterfronts everywhere. Schools in Lee County play a key role in community life. With over 9,900 employees, the School District is the county's largest employer, and with the District's extensive construction program to build new schools and renovate existing buildings, the District is also the area's largest developer. Construction projects are always under way to ensure that the area's

educational facilities stay abreast with the community's growth” (School District of Lee County Home Page, 2005).

From the individual high school’s website, we find the following extract from the School Improvement Plan narrative summary. I have substituted the pseudonymic name. “ ‘Marsh’ High School maintained high achievement on the FCAT Reading, Math and Writing. ‘Marsh’ continued to achieve at or above the state and county averages on all portions of the test. An analysis of data provided by the most recent test scores revealed areas where improvement was necessary . As a result of the data provided by our test scores, we find: Math -- 36.6% of students at levels 1 and 2, with 15.1% of students at level 1; and Reading -- 57.7% of students at levels 1 & 2, with 24.3% at level 1” (School District of Lee County Home Page, 2005).

According to the Florida Department of Education website:

**Table 1:**  
**Adequate Yearly Progress Report**

| <b>2005 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Report - School Level - Page 1</b> |                    | <b><u>LEE, "Marsh" High School</u></b> |                             |
|---|--------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| <b>Did the School Make Adequate Yearly Progress?</b>                      | <b>Provisional</b> | <b>Percent of Criteria Met: 80 %</b>   |                             |
| <b>Total Writing Proficiency Met:</b>                                     | <b>YES</b>         | <b>2005 School Grade:</b>              | <b>B</b>                    |
| <b>Total Graduation Criterion Met:</b>                                    | <b>YES</b>         |  |                             |
|   | <b>95% Tested</b>  | <b>Reading Proficiency Met</b>         | <b>Math Proficiency Met</b> |
| <b>Total</b>  | YES                | YES                                    | YES                         |
| <b>White</b>  | YES                | YES                                    | YES                         |
| <b>African American</b>   | YES                | NO                                     | NO                          |
| <b>Hispanic</b>   | YES                | NO                                     | YES                         |
| <b>Asian</b>  | NA                 | NA                                     | NA                          |
| <b>American Indian</b>  | NA                 | NA                                     | NA                          |
| <b>Economically Disadvantaged</b>   | YES                | NO                                     | YES                         |
| <b>Limited English Proficiency</b>  | YES                | NO                                     | NO                          |
| <b>Students with Disabilities</b>   | YES                | NA                                     | NA                          |

The portion of this Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) report which interests me is specifically the line concerning the limited English proficient (LEP) students, who, according to state criteria, did not make AYP in either Reading or Math in 2005. We can also see, furthermore, that the subsections for African American, Hispanic, and Economically Disadvantaged students did not meet Annual Yearly Progress in Reading. (Florida Department of Education, No Child Left Behind, AYP, 2005).

The high school graduation requirements in the state of Florida are in four parts, as follows: 1) Attendance – not more than 10 absences per every 90-day semester; 2) Credits – a minimum of 24, divided into certain subject-area requirements and certain elective areas, it is expected that a student earns 7 credits per year; 3) Grade Point Average (GPA) – a minimum of 2.0 attained by the end of senior year; and 4) FCAT – pass the 10<sup>th</sup> grade level state Florida Comprehensive Achievement Tests (FCAT) exams in both Reading and Math.

The Haitian adolescent students who are part of this study’s focus group are all in the category of Limited English Proficient (LEP) at ‘Marsh’ High, and all have LY status in the ESOL program. They all attend either English grade-level classes through ESOL (English I through ESOL, English II through ESOL, English III through ESOL, or English IV through ESOL), in which they receive their required English Language Arts credit toward graduation, or Intensive Reading-type classes delivered through the ESOL Developmental Language Arts elective, or both of these classes (one of each type). These Haitian immigrant students are all members, furthermore, in the ‘Haitian-American Students Club’ (HASC), meetings of which are held after school on Monday afternoons.

#### Subjects / Participants

“In Haiti, all relationships are exchange relationships. They are defined in terms of gifts and counter-gifts of tangibles (food, service, shelter) and intangibles (respect, love, fidelity)” (McCarthy-Brown, 1985, p. 69).



There is no tradition of research in Haiti – exposing ones’ lives to researchers/ interviewers is unknown – so what does “consent” mean to them? This is a vulnerable population of recent immigrants and minors. IRB forms are comprehensive, complicated, and intimidating, and even when translated into Haitian Creole, this does not necessarily make them ‘any better’ or more accessible to the students and their parents. The consent letters were very carefully explained in Creole by the paraprofessional to the students. I believe that, due to the exchange-relationship nature of Haitian societal mores, the students who were willing to participate in the focus group gave their consent partially because they know that I am (and continue to be) helpful to them as an advocate and caring problem-solver in their daily school-lives. I did not put this kind of pressure on them, nor voice it in any way. But my instinct tells me that these Haitian students prefer to remain ‘friends’ with me, and/or to be thought of as ‘cooperating’ with me. I am very careful about this, due to their very vulnerability as a population, and am always conscious of the necessity of not abusing their trust.

The number of Haitian students who attended this researcher’s ESOL English classes daily, and ALSO were members of the Haitian American Students’ Club (HASC) meeting on Monday afternoons, was 36. These 36 students all attended both meetings of the HASC in April 2005 when the oral interviewing was accomplished. From that pool of 36 Haitian students who participated in the initial oral phase of the interviewing in groups (using the focus questions, see Appendix A) during several Monday-afternoon meetings of the HASC, I chose 19 students for one-on-one interviewing, using the same focus questions. The 19 students wrote their responses in English to these focus questions during the second round of questioning. Hence, the voices/words of 19 different Haitian

students are present in Chapter Four, 13 males and 6 females. I have described them in narratives, using their assigned pseudonyms, and those longer descriptions can be found in Appendix C. Below I have summarized their characteristics.

Legend:

Name = pseudonym

Gender = male or female

Grade = high school grade (9 through 12)

Age / Real Age = the age the student's birth certificate on file in school claims him or her to be, vs. the age we believe him or her to really be, based on personal communications or confidences

Time in USA = expressed in years and months since arrival in the county public schools, based on the date from the Registration form

**Johnson** – Gender = male; Grade = 12; Age/Real age = 18/22; 5 yrs in FL.

**Wildy** – Gender = male; Grade = 10; Age/Real age = 16/16; 5 yrs in FL

**Sheldon** – gender = male; grade = 11; age/real age = 17/17; 18 months in FL.

**Rodney** – gender = male; grade = 11; age/real age = 18/19+; 4 years in FL.

**Clarence** – gender = male; grade = 12; age/real age = 19/19; 3 years in FL.

**Kenny** – gender = male; grade = 11; age/real age = 17/17; 18 months in FL.

**Vogler** - gender = male; grade = 12; age/real age = 18+/20+; 4 years in FL.

**Vince** – gender = male; grade = 11; age/real age = 18/20?; 5 years in FL.

**Robert** – gender = male; grade = 11; age/real age = 18/20; 4 years in FL.

**Richard** – gender = male; grade = 12; age/real age = 18+/18+; 5 years in FL.

**Gerbert** – gender = male; grade = 12; age/real age = 19/19; 5 years in FL.

**Ivan** – gender = male; grade = 11; age/real age = 17/20+; 2.5 years in FL.

**Renaud** – gender = male; grade = 11; age/real age = 17/20+; 4 years in FL.

**Nancy** – gender = female; grade = 12; age/real age = 19/25+; 3 years in FL.

**Madeline** – gender = female; grade = 10; age/real age = 16/16; 4 years in FL.

**Sabina** – gender = female; grade = 11; age/real age = 17/19; 4 years in FL.

**Isaline** – gender = female; grade = 11; age/real age = 17/17; 3 years in FL.

**Radella** – gender = female; grade = 12; age/real age = 18/18-20; 2.5 years in FL.

**Naomi** – gender = female; grade = 12; age/real age = 19/19; 5 years in FL.

Also, it is important to understand that although their voices are not quoted in the chapter of data analysis, the two Haitian adult male paraprofessionals are an integral and very important part of the school's community of Haitians, lending, with their daily Créole-to-English, English-to-Créole interpretations, a depth of caring concern, understanding and cultural negotiation to us all. The presence of the Creole interpreters at this school site is, quite simply, a priceless resource. No amount of money on earth could pay for the depth of these men's commitment to and insights about their community of Haitian adolescents. There is no way for me to measure how much I have learned from these two men over the years of our professional relationship in education, but without their help, insights and explanations, I would probably never have been able to embark on this study of mine. Every one of the students in the focus group turns to

one or the other of these men as a problem-solver, trusted father-figure, role model, counselor and cultural bridge-maker.

### Data Collection

“Contradictory interpretations of the world are carried concomitantly, and nor is there any single mode of knowing that informs the anthropologist.

Anthropologists doing fieldwork are conscious of observing part of the cultural construction at part of a society at a particular time. Local affairs cannot be addressed without serious attention to the larger implications of the local moment. Evidence of connections with social fields beyond the ethnographic site can lead to some of those significations” (Falk-Moore, 1987, p. 735).

After several years of observing and talking with Haitian adolescent immigrant students in my classroom, I decided that my interest in the collective “picture” they present to me was so great and so abiding, that my dissertation topic would be centered with them. After submitting my proposal, the school district gave me permission to do my study, with the stipulation that teaching-and-learning classroom time could not be monopolized by my research to the detriment of students’ educational needs and learning goals, a stipulation which is entirely fair and correct. This stipulation was not a problem, however, because I am also the sponsor of the Haitian American Students’ Club which meets Mondays after school. There, many Haitian students (up to 36 at a time, although they are almost never all in attendance at every meeting) stay in school in my classroom of their own free will; the Club has some agenda items typical of teenagers (banner-

making and decorating; organizing and hosting a “Haitian party”; thinking of ways to shed positive light on Haitian culture for the rest of the non-Haitian student body; collecting items to send to a school in Haiti, etc.). All of the students who attend this club know me very well, and I believe it would be fair to say that a level of trust and confidence has already been established between them and myself.

So after obtaining students’ and their parents’ consent, I began asking the focus questions in the setting of the Monday-afternoon Haitian American Students’ Club. This activity with the group furnished the agenda for two entire afternoon club sessions. I taped these two sessions on audiotape, but I also made notes for myself as we were talking together, especially on which students interested me with their insights or their types of comments during responses. I did not transcribe (type) these large-group sessions, but used them as the mechanism for decision-making in order to find my ‘real’ focus-students whose voices would be used in the dissertation. The decisions as to inclusion in the final focus-group were based on the quality, depth, or interesting nature of the students’ responses in the first rounds of interview sessions, as well as other criteria which I detail in Chapter 4. As soon as I was finished with the two large-group sessions, during the ensuing Monday afternoons, I began questioning those 19 students with the same focus questions. The students wrote their answers to the focus questions this time. This permits me to quote them verbatim, and for us to glimpse their levels of functioning, with their limited-proficiency English-language skills as they are. A few students kindly came back to me during some of our common lunch-times to finish up the questioning during the month of May 2005. Haitian students are frequently found “hanging out” in my room during lunch-time of their own volition. The ambiance in my

room at lunchtime is comfortable and friendly, with casual chatting going on in a variety of languages.

The other textual data that was used in this study is from written responses by the same 19 Haitian students to ESOL English and/or ESOL Intensive Reading classroom writing-prompts. These writings were based on assignments during the school-year 2004-2005. One thing I discovered is that I could ask ‘one question’ and get an entirely different answer from the sort I was expecting back from my students. They tend to write about what is on their minds, and they manage to work in their own concerns and themes, no matter what the original writing-prompt was supposedly ‘about’. Working on an ‘FCAT skill’ such as “compare and contrast” would often be a jumping-off point for a Haitian student to get in his/her own point, slightly aside from the points I was expecting, but nevertheless answering my prompt satisfactorily. Making connections between the literature we were reading and real life was another area of fertile ground for students to write about the important things on their minds.

### Procedures

A chance remark by a fellow researcher in Haitian Studies set the tone for my questions to the students: “...and if you’re studying how Haitian cultural and social inequalities manifest themselves in the U.S. educational system, how would you really get to the question about image? About learned superficiality?” (M. Schuller, personal communication, 2004). I did indeed want my Haitian immigrant students to speak to me about their ‘learned superficiality’, but I was aware that this advanced and abstract

concept would not be easy for them to access – they are immigrant high school students with an LY status, learning the English language, situated approximately in intermediate levels of English functioning, reading and writing on elementary-school levels for the most part, often with a limited or interrupted formal educational background, with no training whatsoever in domains such as anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, etc.

The problem was to ask the students the ‘right questions’. I designed a series of focus questions around themes such as: a) Success (meaning of success, 3 questions; appearance of success, 3 questions; expectations for success, 2 questions); b) Good grades and ‘really learning’ (three questions); c) Reading comprehension and literacy (and their link to success, one question; educational link to future, one question; and link between success and learning English, one question); d) Types of thinking involved in school in Haiti and in Florida (two questions); e) What Haitian students have to do/learn/change in the USA when they first arrive (one question); f) Linguistics and expectations for understanding of instruction (2 questions); g) Cheating (one question); h) Face-saving behavior (one question); i) parents’ beliefs about education (one question); and j) Availability or absence of school programs as conditions of success (four questions). I asked the 26 focus questions in a series, sometimes mixing up the subjects of the questions from one to the next so that the students’ thinking would be stimulated afresh by the change of tack. The focus questions are listed in Appendix A.

“What is known is inextricably linked to how it is known” (Brueggemann, 1992, p10). The focus questions stemmed essentially from my own thoughts and observations of the Haitian adolescent student community over time, and also the input of adult scholars and professors. I started out with the perception that Haitian adolescent students

position the concept of success in a superficial, appearance-based manner, and I have retained that impression. But it is not only an economic matter. Although ‘all’ teenagers might equate success with financial standing and the economic possibility of having many possessions, I still believe that Haitian teenagers locate and recognize the concept of success mostly through superficial status-marker/possessions/position-in-life posturing, according to the ways of their culture. Also, there is an absence of discussion about the relative importance of literacy or comprehension of reading, in this particular focus group of Haitian immigrant adolescents.

I have also learned additional nuances and insights through the Haitian children’s own voices. One of the themes of my own, which was very important to me, left the kids with nothing whatsoever to say, and this absence of discussion appears very ‘telling’ to me. I now call it, “No thoughts about literacy” -- although they do believe that good grades are ‘important’ to have in school (believing that grades inherently have value in and of themselves), the students do not speak/write of relating their grades with their own reading ability, and they do not discuss reading comprehension or literacy as being relevant to their own success in life. The act of reading is apparently not relevant or meaningful to their current lives, even though they spend six and a half hours a day in a public secondary school. “By discovering the meanings and uses of literacy for members of diverse cultural communities, anthropologists can help educational planners take into account what adults want literacy to do for them” (Weinstein-Shr, 1995, p.91).

Three of the themes that emerged were not even part of or guided by my original focus questions; some of their insights were unexpected; and all of these three new themes informed my study: 1) Racism -- these students are very aware of and concerned



with racism as a barrier to their own success; 2) “Choosing not to learn”-- they are aware of school programs which might aid them, but consciously do not always take advantage of opportunities; 3) “Memories of Haiti” -- they carry many important and resonant memories of their lives in Haiti, academic or otherwise, and refer to these frequently, and they also carry aspirations for positive change in their country of origin. Many of the children are deeply homesick, and for many years. The students’ thoughts about these themes will be gone over in more detail in Chapter Five during the data analysis.

### Researcher Bias

“We reject the notion that any research project can be unbiased or claim objectivity. Our view of the world and our commitment to and involvement with students inform our studies and shape our questions” (Sharkey & Layzer, 2000, p. 354).

My ‘commitment to and involvement with students’ also occasionally made me wary of the very perceptions that I was acting upon, the questions which I wanted to ask, but perhaps, as a scholar, should not. There is a fine line of ethics when one is a teacher-researcher in a vulnerable community of youngsters. I mentioned some of the themes that came out of the students’ answers to my focus questions above, those whose emergence were undeniably strong and poignant. I must say to my readers that I had wanted to ask these students more focus questions about their beliefs about cheating, but I was simply afraid that this would be perceived by either students or readers as prejudicial of me, as pejorative, as being some kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy. I am glad that the one question I did ask about cheating, bore such fruit and confirmed my own

thoughts about their perceptions of it. I did not ask any questions about racism or discrimination, but this theme emerged from the students themselves, for which I was also very content.

“Scholars are often wary of citing commitments to social justice, for, in the stereotype, an ice-cold impartiality acts as the sine qua non of proper and dispassionate objectivity. I regard this argument as one of the most fallacious, even harmful, claims. Impartiality (even if desirable) is unattainable by human beings with their inevitable backgrounds, needs, beliefs, and desires. It is dangerous for a scholar to imagine that he might attain complete neutrality. Objectivity must be operationally defined as fair treatment of data, not absence of preference. No conceit could be worse than a belief in one’s own intrinsic objectivity – the best form of objectivity lies in explicitly identifying preferences so that their influence can be recognized and countermanded” (Gould, 1996, p.36-37).

Although I do consider the Haitian community in this county/area to be particularly voiceless and powerless, lacking in effective advocates, and especially disorganized and leaderless, I am not attempting to ‘solve problems’ for them here in my study. I am resolute in having this study remain an ethnographic portrait of a group of adolescents who have arrived here from another country, bringing old constraints and strengths with them, and finding new elements to contend with once here. How they perceive or resolve the tensions created between the old and the new systems, and what they can tell us about how they advance towards their own success-goals, are the foci of my attention. This study is the “description and interpretation of a culture-sharing group” (Cresswell, 1998,

p. 39) of one set of Haitian immigrant adolescent students in one public high school in one middle-sized Florida town in one academic year, and cannot necessarily be extrapolated to other Haitians, other adolescents, other immigrants, other cities, or other academic years.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

### Introduction

The purpose of this study is to make connections from the cultural and societal influences and factors impacting current Haitian adolescent immigrant students, to their perceptions about academic success in Florida – how to achieve it and what it looks like – and how these perceptions may impact their behaviors. All of the guiding questions of the research, and focus questions asked of the students in this study, are subsumed under this purpose.

The perceptions of, and beliefs about, the educational issues affecting their academic success, of adolescent Haitian immigrants who have arrived in the United States within the last five years were examined. The purpose of this study encompasses describing how a focus group of recently-arrived Haitian adolescent immigrants understand, explain, and possibly resolve the tensions between differing images of success. The perceptions and beliefs of the immigrant Haitian students themselves were considered, using their own words. The over-arching research question that was asked is, “What do the adolescent Haitian immigrant students themselves identify as their perceptions, beliefs and issues impacting their own academic success in a Florida public high school?” (Or put another way: according to Haitian adolescent immigrant students, what is the purpose of education and what does their success at this education ‘look like’?)

After studying most of the potential factors from their country and culture which influence the Haitian adolescent immigrant students, my goal was to link these factors to the students' own perceptions regarding academic success and how to achieve it. According to Bandura, the students' perceptions regulate their behavior (Bandura, 1986). The school, their homes, and the neighborhood where these students live and work is their 'social environment'. According to Gredler (2001) when discussing Bandura's Social-Cognitive Learning Theory, "The social milieu provides numerous opportunities for individuals to acquire complex skills and abilities through the observation of modeled behaviors and the behavioral consequences. The learner can abstract a range of information from observing the behavior of others, and make decisions about which behaviors to adopt and enact. Most environmental influences on behavior are mediated by a variety of internal personal factors" (Gredler, 2001, p. 317). According to the design of the study, the Haitian students said and wrote in their own words what and how they thought about academic success, what it is, and how to 'get it' in Florida. They thereby discussed their own perceptions, and insight could be gained into their actual school-setting behaviors. The data analysis chapter consists of the Haitian adolescent immigrant students' own speeches and writings about their own perceptions surrounding the issue of academic success.

There was a list of 26 focus-questions to ask the students (see Appendix A). Each of the students were asked the 26 questions. These questions were designed around themes such as 'success', 'reading comprehension', 'availability of the conditions for success in school', etc. The 26 focus questions (in Appendix A) are listed in the order in which they were asked.

## Phases of Data Collection

There were three phases to the collection of data. Phase One took place verbally, in large group sessions, with 36 students (Haitian-American Club members) free to speak up in answering the focus questions presented to them. Phase Two took place in writing, as 19 chosen students wrote answers to the focus questions. Phase Three data were extracts, gathered over time, from written classroom compositions or answers to writing-prompts by the same 19 students.

To chart the progression of the data-collection:

2 hours times 36 students in oral interviews.

2 to 3 hours times 19 students in written-response interviews.

Classroom writing-extracts times 19 students, unquantifiable hours.

Phase One of the data collection took place during two meetings of the Haitian-American Students' Club, in April 2005. The Club students were also students in the classes of the researcher. The Club meets regularly after school on Monday afternoons, twice a month. There were 36 students present at the meetings. During the first of the two meetings which were used for data collection, the first 13 focus questions from the list were asked verbally of the group. During the second afternoon meeting (two weeks later), the second 13 questions were asked verbally of the students. Both after-school sessions lasted approximately 90 minutes each. The sessions were audio tape-recorded. This audio data was not transcribed. This group of 36 students is hereafter referred to as the Audio Focus Group. The researcher participated in the general conversations with the students surrounding the focus questions during the two after-school meetings, listened to

and reviewed the tapes carefully, and chose a smaller group of students for Phase Two of the data collection.

The following criteria were developed to identify the final participants in the smaller focus-group study:

- gender representation
- spectrum of ages represented from 16 through 20 (or older – see notes on fake birth certificates)
- spectrum of grade-levels represented from 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>
- represent as full a spectrum as possible of length of time in Florida, ranging from 18 months through 5 years
- a spectrum of ability of English language skills ranging from ‘low-intermediate’ through ‘advanced’
- students appeared open, comfortable and at ease expressing both positive and negative reactions and thoughts

Two male students who were disruptive, off-task or unwilling to seriously participate during the large group (afternoon club setting) sessions were not included in the final selection of 19 students for Phase Two. The final number of students selected for Phase Two data collection based on the above criteria was 19.

The Phase Two group will hereafter be referred to as the Written-Response focus group.

Phase Two of the data collection consisted of the participation of 19 written-response focus-group students, who were each given a printed copy of the 26 focus questions, in English, with space between the lines for them to be able to write open-

ended responses. Up to three hours were given to each student, although most took approximately two hours to write their responses. The majority of the 19 students wrote their written responses entirely during two subsequent Haitian-American Students' Club after-school meetings in May 2005. They took approximately two to two-and-a-half hours to write their answers. Three of the students, two females and a male, chose to spend some of their lunch-times in May 2005 in my classroom finishing their writing of answers to these focus questions. These three felt that they needed more time to write what they really wanted to say. This could be attributed to their having longer answers, or to their being more painstaking overall, or to their levels of English-writing skills. I chose to use the same 26 focus questions for the written responses as I had used for the oral interviews. In the oral time together in Phase One, students may have been 'speaking off the tops of their heads' or piggybacking on what someone else had just said. I wanted the students in the Written-Response focus group to make a mental commitment to what they really wanted to say, by writing it down.

Phase Three of the data collection consists of extracts from classroom compositions and students' answers to classroom writing-prompts. These written extracts are all from the 19 students who formed the written-response focus group. As a part of the ESOL English curriculum, we regularly answer prompts in writing. These are generally designed for students to make links from reading / literature texts to their real life experiences, thoughts and opinions. This is a regular part of the curriculum; it is habitual for the students to answer prompts in writing. They were not asked to do anything unusual or contrived. Answering writing-prompts is a part of the students' zone of comfort and usualness in my classroom. From years of doing these essays and shorter



written answers with students, I had recognized that adolescent students reveal significant aspects of their lives, perceptions, thoughts, feelings and beliefs through these writing prompts or stimuli. Recognizing the power and significance of what they write in these classes, I realized that this data source could have value for the study. As they were distributed in various sections of the classes that I taught in 2004-2005, all 19 students' writings of this nature were available to the researcher for consideration.

### Analysis of the Data

There are thirteen themes which emerged from the three data sources. The first ten are dominant themes which are prevalent in all sources. The first ten themes were consistently represented from reactions to the focus questions in both Phase One and Phase Two. The concepts represented in the first ten themes were also reinforced in the data from Phase Three, extracts from the students' compositions and answers to writing prompts. Hence, the first ten themes were strongly established in all three data sources which included students' direct input.

The last three themes were not as strongly represented in all three data sources; however, the power and significance of the students' writings leading to the last three themes provoked the researcher into including them. Although not expressed as frequently in all three data sources, the last three themes emerged from powerful and passionate expressions on the part of the students. The last three themes to emerge are: "Racism", "Memories and thoughts of Haiti", and "Choosing not to learn". All three of these themes have a direct and crucial relationship to Haitian adolescent students'

perceptions of success and what factors affect them 'having it'. These themes fit into the framework of the five initial guiding questions which had been asked in the design of the study. However, instead of the focus-questions leading the students to respond to elements within the design of the study (as happened in the emergence of the first ten themes), the emergence of the last three themes was student-driven. It could be said, therefore, that the first ten themes are researcher-driven and the last three themes are student-driven.

Using an open coding process (Cresswell, 2002), the focus group data, the interview data, and the other textual data were reduced to 13 themes (or salient categories) related to the range of responses that the Haitian students expressed regarding their own issues concerning success. These 13 themes were determined by dividing the texts into segments, coding these segments, searching for and reducing redundancy in the codes, and finally collapsing the codes into themes or patterns that describe how Haitian students consider these tensions. These themes fit into categories created by the five guiding questions of the study.

Cresswell (1998) outlines the processing of qualitative research data as a 'data analysis spiral', containing phases such as data collection, data managing or organizing for storage, reading the data and writing memos, classifying or categorizing the data, describing, and interpreting. Cresswell recommends in the stage just after data-collection, "Researchers continue analysis by getting a sense of the whole database: read the transcripts in their entirety several times, immerse yourself in the details, trying to get a sense of the whole before breaking it into parts" (Cresswell, 1998, p. 143).

In the focus group interviews and the individual interviews (textual data) of the Haitian students, emerging connections, emerging patterns, emerging categories of concern and emerging themes were sought. “Category formation represents the heart of qualitative data analysis. Here researchers describe in detail, develop themes or dimensions, and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of perspectives in the literature” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 144). After multiple readings, the textual data from the focus-group of Haitian students were sorted and coded into 13 themes and related to the review of existing literature. The key phrases, types of responses and categories of responses from the Haitian adolescent students formed patterns of attitudes and perceptions (13 themes) leading to a greater awareness of their academic experiences and consequent feelings of success (or failure) in a public high school in Florida. These thirteen themes were inserted into the categories created by the five guiding research questions. “Classifying pertains to taking the texts or qualitative information apart, looking for categories, themes, or dimensions of information. These themes I view as a family of themes, with ‘children’, or sub-themes, and ‘grandchildren’, represented by segments of data” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 144).

“We examine the qualitative data working inductively from particulars to more general perspectives, whether these perspectives are called themes, dimensions, codes, or categories. We experiment with many forms of analysis to convey simultaneously breaking down the data and reconfiguring them into new forms. We represent our data, partly based on participants’ perspectives and partly based on our own interpretation” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 20).

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE EMERGENT THEMES

### Descriptions of Themes

There are thirteen themes which emerged from the students' speech and writings during the study. First the themes are presented here as a stand-alone list; then secondly the themes are categorized in relation to the guiding questions of the study (from Chapter One).

The following are the thirteen themes in outline form:

Theme 1: "Success"

1A: Success and its meanings

1B: Success and its appearance

1C: Success and expectations

Theme 2: "Good grades"

2A: Good grades and their importance

2B: Good grades versus really learning

Theme 3: "Reading Comprehension / Literacy"

3A: Reading comprehension and its link to 'success'

3B: Reading comprehension and its link to students' futures

3C: Reading comprehension and success in English-language literacy

Theme 4: "Types of thinking done in schools in Haiti and Florida"

Theme 5: "What Haitian students have to do/learn when they first arrive"

Theme 6: "Languages and Expectations of Understanding"

Theme 7: "Cheating"

Theme 8: “Face-Saving”

Theme 9: “Availability in School of the Conditions Needed for Success”

9A: What is Present in School

9B: What is Lacking in School

Theme 10: “Parents’ Beliefs about Education”

Theme 11: “Racism”

Theme 12: “Memories and Thoughts of Haiti”

Theme 13: “Choosing Not to Learn”

Here is how these thirteen themes that the students talked and wrote about, fall into the categories formed by the original five guiding questions of the study:

Guiding Question 1: What do Haitian immigrant students report that a successful student or a successful person should look, sound and act like?

Theme 1: Success

Theme 2: Good grades

Guiding Question 2: How have Haitian immigrant students incorporated the concepts of literacy, content-area literacy, reading comprehension, and thinking / problem-solving skills into their perceptions and notions of success?

Theme 3: Reading Comprehension / Literacy

Theme 4: Types of thinking in Haitian and Florida schools

Guiding Question 3: Do adolescent Haitian immigrant students, who have been formally educated in Haiti in French rather than in their Creole mother tongue, have

certain expectations (positive, negative or neutral) for their own levels of comprehension of academic subjects in an American high school?

Theme 5: What Haitian students have to do or learn when they first arrive

Theme 6: Languages and expectations of understanding

Guiding Question 4: What other concerns influence the development of Haitian immigrant students' perceptions of their own academic success?

Theme 7: Cheating

Theme 8: Face-Saving

Theme 9: Availability in school of the conditions needed for success

Theme 10: Parents' beliefs about education

Theme 11: Racism

Guiding Question 5: What other tensions, if any, do Haitian immigrant students report between Haitian societal and educational norms and beliefs, and American ones, regarding 'success'?

Theme 12: Memories and thoughts of Haiti

Theme 13: Choosing not to learn

The data analysis proceeds here in Chapter 5 as Cresswell indicates, "...the utility of 'excerpt commentary' units, whereby an author incorporates an analytic point, provides orientation information about the point, presents the direct quote, and then advances analytic commentary about the quote" (Cresswell, 1998, p. 183). The first ten themes in the data analysis were the ones that I 'expected' to have emerge, based on the focus questions which I had formulated, which were designed with the five guiding

questions of my study in mind. The textual data from questions in Themes 1 and 2 served their purposes adequately for the study, and although perhaps they contained few surprises, the data is rich in students' comments and should interest readers. The textual data in Theme 3 reveals a certain dearth of thought or discussion on the part of the Haitian students. I think that this very dearth of feedback or comments on the part of the immigrant students regarding their own reading comprehension/literacy (or its importance) is an important finding in and of itself. The data in Themes 4, 6 and 8 tend to have students making similar-to-each-other and rather banal comments (as compared to some of the other, more rich/fertile areas). The data in Themes 5, 7, 9, and 10 turned out to be richer and more profound than my own expectations for them.

The last three themes, 11, 12 and 13, were the ones that emerged from the students themselves, their speech and writings revealing the depth and importance of their thoughts and concerns on these matters, so although I was not 'planning' on these three themes, I did not choose to eliminate them from my study's discussions. All three of these themes have a direct and crucial relationship to Haitian adolescent students' perceptions of success and what factors affect them 'having it'. These themes do fit into the framework of the five initial guiding questions which had been asked.

Although the students' words are quoted verbatim, naturally, in reporting the data, these limited English proficient (LEP) students' English-language skills make for some distortions of what they mean to say; but wherever the concept the student means to express is difficult for the readers to understand on their own, I have tried to provide "more standard English renderings" for clarification. Also, the focus group students use very little punctuation when they write in English. However, Cresswell gives support for

the idea of using quotes in an ethnography when he writes, “Authors bring in the voice of participants in the study. Writers use ample quotes; the longer quotation is used to convey more complex understandings. Longer quotes may contain many ideas, and so the reader needs to be guided both “into” the quote and “out of” the quote to focus his or her attention on the controlling idea that the writer would like the reader to see” (Cresswell, 1998, pps. 170-171). Naturally, in using the words of the students verbatim, my intention is not to be derogatory towards them or their current abilities and skills in the English language. I have enormous compassion towards LEP students who are struggling with the English language while mastering secondary academic content, grappling with understanding the availabilities of future career options, and juggling home- and job-related responsibilities. I wish to give the flavor and tone of their written responses accurately to present the truest possible picture in this ethnography.

### Theme 1: Success

There are eight of the focus questions involved in this first large and essential topic; the theme or category is divided into three sub-topics (see outline). The first sub-topic exists simply to define the students’ meaning of the concepts of ‘success’ and ‘successful’. There is very general agreement among the Haitian teens of the focus group on the meaning of the concepts of ‘success’ and ‘successful’. Their definitions and explanations of behaviors surrounding these two related concepts seem to be in line with the mainstream (“American”, “European”, “standard”) definitions which we could probably hear from any students of any age, culture, country, background, or school.



## Theme 1A: Success and its meanings

The first topic to consider is the Haitian immigrant students' definitions of success: what do the concepts of 'success' and 'successful' mean? Here we are discussing their answers to focus questions 1, 3 and 8.

Henceforth, all words which follow a student's pseudonym and a colon are direct citations from the student's writing. My own comments and analytic points will be in italics, in brackets. When speaking of their ideas of what a typical successful student looks, sounds and acts like (in response to Focus Question 1), the Haitian students use such terms and phrases as:

### **1. What does a successful student look, sound and act like?**

Clarence: They active, always on time, care about, preparation always

Gerbert: A successful student will be always do their work and always have a good grade in class, asking questions all the time do what the teacher assign and no complains.

Isaline: Is a student who always did their work and turn it in, on time and another thing is not copying from your friend even though [though] it was easy to do

*[Clarence, Gerbert and Isaline speak about actions and behaviors when discussing 'successful' students.]*

Madeline: Successful student look like someone special, someone who take their life serious, they sound like they confidence, and they act like they proud of themselves.

Nancy: Look smat [smart] and act eterlignent [intelligent]

Sabina: Respect himself and more focus in stuff that [is] important

Robert: They look kind of quiet. When they talk they sound educated

*[Madeline, Nancy, Sabina and Robert have some ideas about how a successful person looks and talks, ideas which reflect a certain superficiality.]*

Richard: Look like somebody who has a future, they always pay attention, they don't disturb

*[Richard uses one example of an 'attitude' and two examples of behaviors to explain his definition of a successful student.]*

Kenny: A successful student is always seen either on a computer doing researches or reading a book. That students will never be rude and will always be respected.

*[Kenny also expresses appearance-based, superficial ideas about successful students needing to be 'seen on a computer or reading a book'. Then he mentions polite behavior towards others.]*

In response to focus question 3, which is also a question defining what success 'is' or 'means', students report the following ideas, which I have divided into two groups, the "typical"/standard/mainstream ideas, exemplified by Richard's, Renaud's, Radella's, Nancy's, and Madeline's responses, and then those which I feel are more specifically "Haitian" in nature, exemplified by Rodney's, Clarence's, Gerbert's, Sabina's, and Johnson's responses:

**3. What makes a person successful? What does it mean to be successful in your career?**

Richard: To be successful is to achieve a goal, when I finished college I think that's successful

Renaud: Successful it when you don't have to worry about nothink [nothing] and that you happy

Radella: Doing the best you can in everything that you're doing, try to be serious but not strick [strict] make a person successful. Do good job where everybody can be proud of you.

Nancy: to be successful you have to work hard do all your jobs you have to be faithfully

Madeline: The thing that make a person successful is all the good things you do, and you feel proud of it, you may also be successful if you reach a goal you was striving for.

*[These students mention reaching a goal and/or doing one's best.]*

Rodney: When the[y] have a good job, to have a lot of money

*[Rodney almost always mentions money in connection with his idea of success.]*

Clarence: A person could be successful by your job, how you dress, kind of people you hang with

*[Clarence always dresses in the most extreme urban-rapper modes, and likes to hang out with the Haitian male 'in crowd'. His response seems particularly superficial, overall.]*

Gerbert: When you achieve something great, people treat you differently and they also show you respect.

*[Gerbert's ideas of success are centered in how he is or will be treated by others.]*

Sabina: Work hard, believe in yourself, and don't let anybody stop you from achieve your dream. Being successful means to have a better life. Raise your kids different from the way your parents been raising.

*[Sabina is going to mention raising her future children many times. She appears to differ strongly in her aspirations, from how her own Haitian parents or her peers' parents are doing the 'raising' of her own generation.]*

Johnson: To be successful in my career, I am suppose to learn after make some money now that will be a good thing.

*[The topic of having a lot of money came up frequently among the Haitian adolescents as a possible or likely definition of success.]*

Focus question 8 asks the students, “Are there any conflicts (contrasts, differences) between ideas about success in Haiti and ideas about success in the United States?”

Almost all of the 19 focus-group students agreed that there ARE differences in these ideas between the cultures of the two countries, and I suspect that the two students who did not agree, did not really understand the question. I have chosen eight students in this section who were able to expound on their ideas about these differences between the two countries in richly enlightening, informative and important ways. Here, the Haitian students start to open up and explain these conceptual differences in their own words:

**8. Are there any conflicts (contrasts, differences) between ideas about success in Haiti and ideas about success in the United States?**

Nancy: Yes there are ‘cause in Haiti people who have friends or relatives in the government have success, in the US it is everyone [who] works hard [that] is successful *[I consider this a very important and valid comment. One other student made this comment, also. The realization that only governmental corruption, ‘having connections’ and ‘pulling strings’ leads to a relative form of ‘success’ in Haiti, no matter what*

*education one has received there, is a reflection of the reality of the country at this time. We have seen this in the discussion of corruption in my review of the literature section.]*

Sheldon: Yes, because when you being successful in the United States it's better than being successful in Haiti because Haiti is a poor country and it doesn't give you the opportunity of making big money.

*[Sheldon is very clear about the possibilities of economic opportunity in the United States. His notion of 'success' is money-based, at least here.]*

Naomi: There is a difference in America it's very good to be successful most people are going to be happy for you, in Haiti to see someone become very successful most people are going to hate you except your family they rather see you as poor and stupid as other people.

*[Naomi's is an important comment also. I have heard this kind of thing before, that Haitian people are usually jealous of others' success, and really hate to see other Haitians becoming successful. Anecdotally, I have heard many comments about Haitians wishing other Haitians to all remain poor and stupid, downtrodden, in the same basket as themselves, etc.]*

Kenny: Yes there are because in Haiti not people who learn is successful but it's people who have friends in the government

*[It doesn't matter what you know/learned, it just matters WHO you know in Haiti. Although getting an education is one way up the ladder of success, even education will be ineffective in Haiti without having strings to pull. Haiti is NOT run as a meritocracy.]*

Richard: Yes, United States have better ideas because we have a lot of technology

Gerbert: Haiti is harder because if you want to pass a class you need to study a lot and know the things you study by heart and there no using book or notes to use on quizzes or test. In the United States students do not learn a thing because everything you do there's really a book involved, so the students will be like I don't need to study because we have the book to use. So they do not stretch at all.

*[Gerbert seems to think that rote memorization is a better method for school-learning, and prevents students from being lazy.]*

Sabina: Sure there is differences between ideas about success in Haiti and U.S.A. because in Haiti everything is complicated. I know there is some school if your parents don't have a car you can't go there. Even though you try hard to work on your career and be successful you can not practice it so what is the whole point of go [to] school and have a career.

*[Sabina is referring to status and prestige issues in Haiti, which are a barrier to success even if the person is intelligent and receives an education, or which do not even allow an intelligent person into the best schools if s/he is from a poor background.]*

Isaline: Yes there are differences because in Haiti we don't speak English, about success in the U.S. is different, in U.S.A. you go to [school] free, and you go to college, you feel financial held [you fill out financial aid forms] so there are lot success in U.S.A. than Haiti.

*[Isaline makes positive remarks about academic things in the USA being free, and equates these with her notion of 'success'.]*

## Theme 1B: Success and its appearance

Next we will move into subtopic two of the major theme of “Success”, which I have entitled, ‘success and its appearance’. This subtopic is handled in questions 2, 4 and 18 of the focus questions. The students are about evenly divided in their opinions about the importance of the appearance of success, with roughly half saying yes [‘the appearance of success is important’] and roughly half saying no to this question. I represent both sides in equal numbers, with the students who think that ‘the appearance of success is as important as success itself’ coming first:

### **2. Is it true that the appearance of success (looking like you are successful) is more important than success itself?**

Isaline: Yes it true

Clarence: Yes they kind of same thing

Johnson: Yes because being successful is very important in these society today.

Naomi: I don’t think is more important because you are not really successful, but it’s good to look successful because you have a lot of confident in yourself.

Renaud: Yes, it is true that the appearance of success is important. The both word mean the same thing.

The following are the students who give explanations as to why they don’t think that the appearance of success is synonymous with success itself:

Radella: The appearance of success is not important [as] the success itself. Because when you’re doing in life it needs to be real not fake.

Vince: You need to be successful instead of you look like you successful.

Robert: It more important to success itself because you could prove it.

Clarence: No, because the appearance of success is just to make you look cleaner compare [to] other people. But is not more important because it can't brain [bring?] you nowhere.

Sabina: No way, looking like you are successful can not be more important than successful itself. That's why now everybody is confuse [d] because we live in a world of lie [s] where you don't [know] which people is successful and which is not. Because I can dress like a successful [person] act like a successful person but I am not I do that just to keep people from talking bad about me.

*[Only Sabina writes about appearances being deceiving.]*

I followed up my question about the appearance of success, with a question about 'looking smart' (#4) and how or if one can do that. Again, the students are pretty evenly divided in their opinions about whether or not one can 'look smart' (with a connotation inherent of thereby perhaps fooling others into thinking something that isn't true); those who think that a student can 'look smart' give some explanations of how, as typified by responses from Vogler, Rodney and Sheldon:

**4. Some people think that you've got to 'look smart'. How do you 'look smart'?**

Vogler: It depend, people can say you look smart buy [by] the way you dress

Rodney: When you look good

Wildy: When you have everything prepared. And when dress like a geek.

*[All three of the latter are appearance-based responses.]*

Sheldon: Probably yes, some people think I'm smart. I'm smart because I'm study and do my work paid attention when the teachers working that why they think I'm smart.



Other students don't think that this phrase has any real meaning, or that it is not possible to 'look smart' if one is not, and their range of responses are represented by Gerbert, Ivan and Kenny:

Gerbert: Look smart don't mean nothing, if you got the brain and you do something good with it I'll will consider it smart. When I look at someone who looks smart is when you working with the intelligence you have instead of rested [wasted] it that beautiful gift on something else.

Ivan: Some people think they smart that's not true. Sometime they cheating. [cheating]

Kenny: I don't look smart.

The majority of the students in the focus group were very guarded, not at all forthcoming, on question 18 when they were asked about creating an image of themselves and making others believe in it. Either they didn't understand the question, or they were not interested in it, or they simply respond with short "yes" or "no" answers here. Only four students have comments on this question which seem worthy of our attention:

**18. Is it a goal to create an image of yourself to show to other people? How do you create your good or bad image? How do you make other people believe in it?**

Radella: Yes it is a goal. I'm going to be a good nice girl.

Richard: Yes I create the goals by asking God for the way.

Johnson: For me it's not, because I like to be myself and I want other people to know that and see that and not create one.

Kenny: It is a goal to create an image of yourself, because people are going to believe in you. I make others believe in me when I make a good example of myself.

Robert: I know why she like me better than my friend cause I dress nicer and better than him.

*[In Robert's view, his extremely-fashionable 'rapper' outfits with brand-name tags hanging down his back make him look 'desirable' or like a 'good rich boyfriend' to the Haitian girls of our area.]*

#### Theme 1C: Success and expectations

In this area of questioning, numbers 15 and 16 of the focus questions, surprisingly enough, only six students made any real connection between “their own hard work” or “why and what they learn” with “their expectations for success”, whether it was in school or at a job/career site. These comments follow.

**15. Do you expect to be successful as a student? Why or why not?**

**16. Do you expect to be successful at your future job? Why or why not?**

Sheldon: Yes, that's why I go to school everyday and learn so in the future I can be useful to myself.

Renaud: Yeah I expect that, thats why I work hard in school I could get a good job

*[Although he has the right idea in his statement, Renaud does NOT work hard in school. He comes to every class throughout his school-day completely unequipped, and often sleeps or daydreams through classes. His GPA is well below the required 2.0.]*

It should be noted that Cresswell wrote, “The juxtaposition of actual behavior and ideal behavior provides an excellent means for describing and analyzing a cultural system” (Cresswell, 1998, p. 330).

Vince: Yeah because I work hard as a student I expect to [be] successful, and at my future job because I want every [one] to no [know] who I am, what I can do

*[This seems to me to be a typical “Haitian” statement, a posturing type statement, when Vince says ‘I want everyone to know who I am’. It takes very little account of the realities of his approximately fifth-grade reading skills at best, third-grade writing skills, and the actual barriers which may prevent him from receiving a high school diploma by passing the FCAT and getting into college or a vocational-technical program.]*

Robert: Yes because I come to school every day and I wanna to leane [learn] some for the future

*[This is a statement which may reflect the Haitian notion that merely being present in school is sufficient for achievement. Robert rarely hands in any work in school.]*

Gerbert: Yes, because my brother and sister have a huge influence on me, because both of them done with college now they in university now. So am trying to follow their footstep, so I wont stay behind.

*[Well, although Gerbert speaks of powerful role-models here, and his desire to do as well as his siblings are doing with his life, he is not referring to or acknowledging the importance of having his own work-ethic, which happens to be a shaky area for him.]*

Sabina: Of course I expect to be successful as a student what do you think I am doing all those works! Because I want my parents to be proud of me and I want to serve as an

example for my kids. I would like to be able to give my kids anything they want, also when I get to a certain age to stop working and retired.

*[Although she comes off as feisty and almost angry, in fact Sabina is the only student in the focus group who seems indignant about these two questions, and her reaction is a logical one, “Why do you think I am doing all of this work?”]*

Now in this same section on “expectations for success” are to follow several students’ comments which exhibit a circular logic, a disconcerting problem with the nature of cause-and-effect. I find their assumptions not only illogical but rather alarming, given their age-range (between about 17 and probably 24 years of age). It’s as if, in their minds, an ‘expectation’ is the same as an assured thing that will definitely happen for them, irregardless of what they do or don’t do to make it so. I say this not only based on questions 15 and 16, but on the entirety of the focus questions set answered by these students, and also my personal knowledge of them as individuals and as students. This group of students makes no mention of success being a result of their own hard work, or anything like that. They do want success (and money), but they seem to assume here that success is ‘a given’ as long as they desire it:

Isaline: I expect to be successful as a student because without success you cannot do nothing. I expect to be successful on my future job because the more success you have is the more money you earn.

Naomi: I expect to be successful at my future job because being successful is great

Rodney: Yes to make a lot of money

Ivan: Yes cause its gonna be good for my life, yes cause Im gonna need more money

Radella: Yes you do, because if you're not a successful as a student that can be affect your reputation. That [having success] will be a good thing for your life and your work's report.

Kenny: I expect to be successful because I like success. If I am successful I am going to have a lot of money, and I'll be great.

Nancy: Yes studend [students] suppose to be successful. Cause we need the money to pay the bill.

*[All of the students in the focus group were already called upon to define their ideas of success and being successful. Therefore, I cannot here make the assumption that they do not know what these mean, or that they are equating the concept of 'being successful' exactly with that of 'working hard'. ]*

## Theme 2: Good Grades

This section is concerned with students' answers to focus questions 5, 6 and 7.

Question 5 alone asks about the importance to them of having good grades in high school, and their reaction to that was unanimously positive, even in the many cases of the Haitian children who are not high achievers academically at our school, who have low GPA's, have been retained, or who do not currently get many good grades. No matter what their current situation, they have a 'mainstream'-like awareness of, and agreement with, the value judgment/idea that getting good grades in high school is desirable and worthy. Some of the lowest performers in high school (of the focus group) are the most adamant about the importance of getting good grades.

Questions 6 and 7 ask the students to distinguish between getting good grades and ‘really learning something’. All but one student were able to delineate this distinction.

#### Theme 2A: Importance of good grades

All of the Haitian students firmly and unequivocally state that getting good grades in high school is very important, in answering focus question number 5. I have divided these responses into three groups, though. In the largest group of students, they all refer to good grades for ordinary reasons: having a good GPA, getting into college, getting a high school diploma, graduating, and ‘usual’ goals like that. They are typified below by Madeline’s and Kenny’s answers:

##### **5. Is it important to get good grades in school? Why?**

Madeline: Yes it is, because good grades will get you to a good college, and you will have a nice career where you making a lot of money.

Kenny: Yes it is important because it helps you having good GPA and be successful. Good grades in school is the key to success.

The next two students, Ivan and Radella, attribute getting good grades in high school with ‘powers’ beyond the reality of the actual ‘uses’ of good grades:

Ivan: To get a good grade is very important is gonna be good for you in you future when you in college. If you don’t get a good grade how you gonna get credit for you college.

*[Ivan seems to believe that the good grades he receives in high school will serve or follow him throughout his future college career as well. Furthermore, Ivan has decided to transfer to a different high school in the county next year, seeming to believe that he will*

*do better in a different school. He even said that he “will earn more credits there”, as if the credits earned were independent of his own level of functioning or effort. This is a very Haitian thing to do, to transfer when one is not doing well in one school, relying on ‘change’ rather than the notions of furnishing effort, changing existing behaviors, etc.]*

Radella: Yes it is important because all your teachers, your friends and your family are going to be so proud of you. And then you will have a good GPA, and enough credit for the year of your graduation.

*[Radella constantly refers to others being proud of her. Her image of herself seems to be grounded upon what others think of her. She wants good grades to please others or so that they will approve of her and see her as ‘good’.]*

The last two students, Sabina and Gerbert, enter into a discussion of other aspects of having good grades in high school, betraying their awareness of the ‘hidden curriculum’ – that of having privileges, and teachers’ liking for high-achieving students:

Sabina: Of course it is important to get good grades because without a good grades you can’t go anywhere when I say good grades that means you have to pass your class and there is student that have better grade than each other. The ones that been having good grades will enjoy a lot of privileges than you that have been joking around instead of doing your work.

Gerbert: It’s important. Teacher will treat you good and they will love you and give you courage to keep [up] the good work, and good grade will get you far in life and also good [grades] will make [you able] to graduate.

*[It is perhaps important to note here that Gerbert was a direct beneficiary of much verbal encouragement, “bugging”, and egging-on from myself and the Haitian paraprofessional*

*in this past school year. In other places, he thanks us in writing for all of our encouragement and pestering of him over the year. He did pass the FCAT Reading and he seems to feel that it is at least partially due to our efforts with him. He is very grateful to us – after the fact – for not losing hope, and, as he says, “giving him courage”.]*

## Theme 2B: Good grades versus really learning

Of the students in the focus group, all of the 19 except one female were able to distinguish the difference between “getting good grades” and “really learning something”. (One female said simply that these two are the same thing. But I always have doubts as to her understanding of concepts.) Many of the students expressed their awareness of the possibility of getting good grades by cheating, as exemplified by Renaud’s, Sheldon’s and Sabina’s responses:

**6. Does getting good grades mean that you have really learned something?**

**7. What is the difference (is there any difference) between getting good grades and really learning?**

Renaud: Yeah but that’s if that person don’t cheat and really do his work.

*Renaud goes on to ask a logical rhetorical question:*

Renaud: Well I don’t think there is a different because how could you get good grade if you don’t know what you doing and learning what you doing

Sheldon: No, because people can copy of [off] each other. There is a big difference between good grades and really learning because you can get good grades in all your



classes just by copying of smart people but when you really learn something, it stays in your head forever.

Sabina: No, making good grades that does not mean you really learned something because you might be cheating because I know some people that have good grades they don't even know what's going on in class. My point is a student can have good grades he does not know anything he's just copying. When you learn something that means you understand and know what you are doing they can come up to you and ask you any question about what you been learning you'll be able to answer.

*[Although Sabina's answer is the most complete, touching on all points, it exemplifies most other students', who express similar thoughts, although not as fully or well.]*

Clarence also goes on to elaborate more fully on the idea that 'knowledge is forever':

Clarence: Getting good grade is just for the time. That will bring you nowhere. Really learning you can prove your skill anytime somebody ask for proof.

And finally, Madeline reasons in her response that grades might not reflect the true value or measure of one's achievements:

Madeline: Not all the times, because someone may get a low grade but still learn more than someone with a higher grade. Getting good grade is a good thing, but really learning is more important.

### Theme 3: Reading Comprehension / Literacy

There are three questions related to this theme: numbers 9, 20, and 25. The sub-topics here are: A) Reading comprehension and its link to success; B) Reading

comprehension and its link to the future; and C) Success as linked to English-language literacy. I am alarmed by the way the students are not able to enter into much discussion about any of these. This area of questioning provides a dearth of information, and the students' inability to discuss, or lack of perceptions in these regards, have become a 'finding' by their very absence. The impression lingers in my mind that they do not see their own reading comprehension as truly important to them or to others.

Theme 3A: Reading comprehension and its link to success

Although the data is rarely quantified in this study, these particular responses are reported by the numbers of students who fell into different categories.

**9. What is the relationship (link) between reading comprehension or literacy, and future success? (Is there any link?)**

Two students (Rodney and Vogler) did not attempt any answer to this question, and left it blank.

One student (Nancy) simply replied, "I don't know".

Thirteen students gave what I would consider a 'platitude' as an answer, which does not tell us anything about either their thoughts or their comprehension of this issue, and these thirteen are represented by Ivan's and Renaud's comments:

Ivan: It's good to know [how] to read.

Renaud: Well I [if] you can't read or write you won't be success in life

In the next three responses, the students admit that they have no idea of either what the question is talking about, or what they should say in response to it:

**9. What is the relationship (link) between reading comprehension or literacy, and future success? (Is there any link?)**

Vince: I don't see any link to me

Nancy: I don't know not the same level I guess

Robert: Not so good cause I don't like reading

Then there are four students who 'take a stab' at answering the question, but they betray that they have no idea either of what it's about, and do not make any connection to 'success' as they were asked to do:

Naomi: The relationship is that you know how to read really good, and understand a lot of big word you're very smart then you're on you're way

Gerbert: Comprehension is you read and try to get something out of it but literacy you have to talk about it and then you have to write the stuff that you just learn

Radella: Reading comprehension helps you to know better, but literacy gives us information of something in the world.

*[All three of the above-quoted students just graduated from high school. Gerbert passed the Reading FCAT and has a standard diploma, the other two did not and do not.]*

Isaline: There different is you literate to be success. And future success is what we do.

*[This rather incoherent response actually attempts to make the link from comprehension of what we read to 'success'.]*

I feel that only Kenny and Sabina are accurately able to sum up the link between reading comprehension and their (or anyone's) future success:

Kenny: I think they're really close related because when you have reading comprehension it is one step to future success. [*Kenny has been in Florida for 18 months but had a 'good' education in a private school in Haiti. See his profile in Appendix C.*]

Sabina: They have a great connection between them because you can not be successful in the future if you don't [know] how to read or write.

### Theme 3B: Reading comprehension and its link to the future

This section (Question 25) asks if there is any connection between the students' reading comprehension and their future careers or aspirations. Sixteen students answered "yes" to this question, one answered "no" but gave a reason, and two left it blank. The first three are typical responses:

#### **25. Is there any link between your education and your future job/career?**

Sheldon: Yes, because the better education you get the better your job career gets.

Radella: My education is forever, so anywhere I go I can use it but a job is something I can change.

Ivan: My link is education because I really want to [be] educated.

[*Ivan seems the least sure of them, as to what exactly he is trying to say.*]

Rodney: Yes ther [e] is one but I don't know [know]

[*Rodney seems to be indicating that he is aware that there is a link between education and his future career, or he has been told or has heard that this is so, but he personally doesn't know what the link is, exactly.*]

Only Kenny dissents with the group opinion on the presence of a link between education and his future. He does give a reason for his thinking.

Kenny: No, because what I want to do is not related to anything [anything] at school.

*[We can only speculate that Kenny's academic courses at our high school have not seemed to be very pertinent or relevant to him lately.]*

### Theme 3C: Success as linked to English language learning

Seventeen out of the nineteen students say that you do have to learn English to be successful in the United States, and we will look at some of them in a moment, since some of them give “other” interesting reasons why they think they/other newcomers need to speak English. The two dissenters give reasons why they think you don't need to learn English. The first seems rather flippant; the second seems serious about what she is saying:

#### **20. Is there any link between learning English and success in the United States?**

Sheldon: No, because you can be successful in the United States just by winning the lottery.

Sabina: I don't think so because I know some people that come in this country don't speak and have success in their lives. Even [though] they don't go to school but they do something else to have success.

*[I wish she had elaborated on what exactly these people do here who don't speak English but whom she considers 'successful'.]*

The next two responses, from Nancy and Radella, are nearly identical (I will only quote one of them) and speak to the fact that although these girls do speak and read English (to a certain extent or level of LEP functioning), they have finished high school here in Florida without receiving standard diplomas. Neither of them passed the Reading FCAT.

Radella: Yes, there is some link between them cause you can learn English so good but if you're not graduate or don't get a diploma, you're not going to have any success in the U.S.A. You need to get a diploma to go to college.

*[Many of those who did not pass the Reading FCAT and hence did not receive a standard diploma – yet – have taken this fact very much to heart. In Radella's case, it really affects her self-image.]*

The following responses to the same question (#20) give “other reasons” why it is important to speak English in America:

Johnson: Yes because when you know English you could defend your self and talk for your self

*[As we will see a bit later in this chapter, Johnson is extremely concerned with his impressions or perceptions of racism and discrimination in the state or the country. This statement about ‘defending yourself’ may be related to those concerns.]*

Richard: Yes, by learning English it will help you in your social life.

Ivan: Yes cause when you learned is not same to when you have fun.

*[I don't really know what to make of these references to social life and having fun in this context, unless they mean learning English is important in relation to more socializing with American peers while in high school.]*

Naomi: When you are from another country it's very good to learn English because you can find a good to help people from you own country, you can translate for them

*[This is an interesting response from this particular student, since she is generally aloof and rather oblivious to other students!]*

Vince: Yeah you have to work more harder than you use [used to]. Because that a different language it hard to be success in here.

*[I assume that by 'in here', Vince means, 'in Florida' or 'in the USA'. He is clear about the additional language barrier making life harder and success more difficult to reach.]*

Kenny: Yes there is any [some] link. If you [are] learning English it was success in the United States because if you don't learn English is to bad [it is too bad]. You can't find [a] job and you can't go somewhere by yourself learning English is very great.

*[Kenny gives the most extensive reasoning on why it is important to learn the English language. Just previously, he had not agreed that education was important, but here he does feel that English is important for him or other immigrants.]*

#### Theme 4: Types of Thinking Done in Schools in Haiti and Florida

There are two focus questions concerned with this topic, numbers 10 and 11. The vast majority of the students in the focus group did not really address these two questions as they were asked. Either they said and wrote nothing in answer to these, or they made some comment which did not address the actual questions but was "beside the point". I believe that only Sabina, Richard, Naomi, Radella and Sheldon understood the questions and actually attempted to address them:

**10. Were you expected to do a lot of independent (critical) thinking and problem-solving when you were in your school in Haiti?**

**11. Do you see any difference in the amount or type of independent (critical) thinking and problem-solving that you have to do in your school in Florida, from what you had to do back in school in Haiti?**

Sabina: No I don't remember me have solve [having to solve] any critical thinking. I did not have to do any thinking and problem-solving.

Richard: No because I wasn't able to think that way in Haiti.

Naomi: It's the same thing they solve problems the same way in schools. Some kids just don't understand they just do whatever they want.

Radella: There are too much differences for example in Haiti the teachers teach better than school in Florida.

Sheldon: Yes, because I understood what they were teaching me.

*[I wonder if these comments from Radella and Sheldon are brought on because of the difficulties of having to learn secondary academic content in their third language?]*

Some of the other comments made by the students in answer to these two questions, however, are pertinent to their school-reality in their past lives in Haiti or their current lives here. Most of these comments refer more to behavior in one or the other place, than to the metacognitive realm of their functioning.

Gerbert: No, because you were too young and you don't have mentality about some things and the things that need to be solve they contact your parents. In Haiti you were like a little slaves because there's no free time because you will always have to study a lot.



Renaud: Yes the [there] is math we don't use no calculator to solve the problem

Richard: We didn't have to take test every week.

Isaline: Very much independence here if you want to do you work or not it up to you

*[Isaline is commenting on an important difference. There is no one cracking whips or beating public school students in Florida to force them to do their work. They are "free to fail". This freedom affects many LEP students in very negative ways; they are used to having the locus of control outside of themselves (with parents or teachers in their home country) concerning doing their daily school assignments and studying, and very often they just let themselves go, they drift into not working on schoolwork.]*

Clarence: What I expected to do a lot when I was to be in Haiti, is when the state test is to hard we a loud to manifest about it.

[...in Haiti, when the state test is too hard, we were allowed to protest about it.]

*[The students are not able to protest effectively about the state FCAT hereabouts!]*

Johnson: Yes, I see some difference between school in Florida and in school Haiti. If I will go back to Haiti right now because I think if I will go back, I will have some difficulty to learn in Creole or French.

*[Johnson seems to be expressing that his academic content-area knowledge and/or his study or organizational skills have not kept apace while he has been learning in English. This is subtractive bilingualism.]*

Madeline: Being in school in Florida make me think a lot, because theres so much drama.

*[I believe Madeline is referring to having a lot of turmoil in school here, with students getting in trouble, fighting, having security guards and deans for discipline, being suspended, etc.]*

Many students wrote about their memories of Haiti in answer to these two questions, as well as in answer to other writing prompts, so much so that I have a separate section in my fifth chapter for “Memories of Haiti”. Those memories are not about problem-solving or critical thinking issues.

#### Theme 5: What Haitian Students Have to Do First

This theme has only one question, number 12. All of the students in the focus group spoke and wrote about the need to learn the English language first and foremost, so there is very general, unanimous agreement on that. A few of the adolescents make some other interesting comments:

**12. When Haitian students first arrive in school in Florida, what do they have to get used to, learn to do, or change (most urgently) in order to do well in school?**

Gerbert: I have to get use to the language and the food taste so different. Then it is hard to communicate to people and the teacher. Also go to different classes, so I get tired easily.

Sabina: They have to get used with the languages with the school’s method like the way they teach etc.

Kenny: In order to do well in school when Haitian students first arrive in school in Florida they have to get used to the American culture, leard [learn] to speak English or change the cruel habbits [habits].

*[Kenny writes at length elsewhere of his memories of being beaten and ill-treated in school while in Haiti.]*

Isaline: When Haitian students arrive in school in Florida they should get somebody who been before them to explain them what to do or not to do, go to school, don't listen to the Haitian radio to [too] much, use dictionary find some word in English know what they mean, do well in school

*[Isaline's idea of having longer-term mentors for foreign students to know 'what to do or not to do' is a good proposal.]*

Vogler: At first they have to get used to the American system, learn the English language, learn to do work in class, change the way you think, just be a new person.

*[Vogler makes a very sweeping statement when he says, "just be a new person"!]*

Nancy: When Haitian students first arrive in school in Florida they very focus in class, to learn and to speak English

Wildy: They have to get use to people helping them.

Madeline: They have to get used to the school, they must learn some small words, change the way they dress too.

Ivan: Stay after school for learned English

*[Alas, Ivan, there is no after-school program for learning English.]*

## Theme 6: Languages and Expectations of Understanding

There are two questions on this theme, numbers 13 and 14. I am not able to group these into one set of answers from the students, because one question is about the

students' comprehension of the instructional language(s) while in Haiti, and the other question is about their comprehension now in Florida, so the questions were analyzed one at a time. In question 13, all of the students in the focus group indicated that they understood all or most of the instruction in their schools in Haiti. However, some of their logic or explanations are a bit 'shaky', so I don't necessarily believe them when they claim to have understood all or most of the instruction in French in their schools. I know these students very well, and most of them are NOT able to carry on even an ordinary, banal conversation with me in the French language now. Obviously if their academic instruction was in Creole, they did very probably understand it all of the time that they were able to hear it.

**13. When you were in school in Haiti, were your teachers teaching in Creole or French most of the time? If it was in French, did you understand the instruction?**

Ivan: Yes I do cause all these is my native language.

Kenny: They mostly taught [taught] on [in] French and I understood 98% of it because I was one of the best students of that class.

*[Is Kenny telling us that other students in that same class in Haiti understood 'less' of the instruction, and if so, was that because it was in French?]*

Sabina: They teach in French most of the time. It's not like we understand the instruction, it is the rule you have to speak especially the schools that I used to go to if you don't speak French they are going to kick [you] out. In Haiti completely if you don't speak French that's mean you did not go to school you don't know anything.

*[Sabina makes several important comments in this one response. “It’s not like we understand the instruction”, which I take to mean that they did not necessarily understand it all of the time, by any matter of means, but that their lack of comprehension did not necessarily “matter” to the school personnel. Sabina also refers to being kicked out of school if one does not comply with the French-only rule, which rule we are aware of from the review of the literature section. And finally, she tells us that if you don’t speak French in Haiti, it is taken to mean that you didn’t go to school at all and that therefore ‘you don’t know anything’, which we also saw in the review of the literature section. ]*

Gerbert: Both languages, but mostly in French because all the book we use in class was written in French, except one.

*[It has already been mentioned in the review of the literature that there are almost no teaching materials published in Creole.]*

Johnson: I understand the instruction if I [it] was in French because Creole is my first language and French I speak a little bit.

*[It is not too clear from this, how/why Johnson understood the instruction in French.]*

Robert: The [they] teaching in French I don’t be understand it every time because I used with [to] speaking Creole

*[Robert is being honest about not understanding the French-language instruction; perhaps more honest than Johnson or Ivan, above. Another comment: unfortunately, after 4 years in public school in Florida, this is the level on which we find Robert’s writing skills in English.]*

In question 14, the students are being asked if they EXPECT to understand the instruction in Florida, which instruction is given in the English language. There are several students who wrote the same illogical types of responses as we saw in Theme 1 (the ‘expectations for success in the future’ section). There is a really a problem or a disjuncture with logical cause-and-effect thinking in some of the members of this focus group. Or, Haitian people think entirely differently about their ‘expectations’ and make more assumptions culturally that their expectations will indeed come true as desired/willed. I am going to put in some of the ‘illogical’ responses first (Robert’s, Ivan’s, Vince’s, Radella’s, and Vogler’s):

**14. Do you expect to understand what is going on (the instruction and the assignments) in classrooms in the USA?**

Robert: Yes I expect to understand. Because in the fureture [future] I’m gonna need it

Ivan: Yes cause you need good grade in class

*[I know that Ivan believes that the good grades he gets are ‘needed’ for various reasons, but that doesn’t explain his apparent ‘expectation’ of good comprehension of English-language academic instruction. The reality of his grades and GPA belies his ‘expectation’ here. ]*

Vince: Yeah I expect to understand because it important for me event [even] I don’t really no [know].

*[“This is important even though I don’t know what it is or why it’s important.” Is that what Vince is saying? ]*

Radella: Yes you do because the it’s going to help your English language.

*[Radella's 'expectation' of comprehension of academic content taught in English is somehow going to help her with her English language learning? Maybe this does have a certain logic to it, particularly if she has prior knowledge of some of the content material; at least it is a positive attitude to have.]*

Vogler: Probably I expect to understand what is going on because you suppose know every classroom.

*[He seems to be saying that whatever is expected of a student, like 'knowing [what's going on in] every classroom', absolutely MUST happen, irregardless of the language barrier or any other difficulty.]*

There is a series of responses from students who do make more sense about this matter of comprehension of English-language instruction in Florida:

Wildy: First of all, my coming to the United States without knowledge of any English at all. So every day I was anxiously waiting to learn more and more words. I was so eager to know more that I would pay this Haitian kid to help me with reading and speaking skills. I would bother the kid a lot but of course he was teaching me more because I kept giving him my lunch money. Because you can't just sit there in class doing nothing, then how will you learn.

*[I find the story of Wildy's paying another Haitian student to teach him more and more English words quite poignant, and his relating of this memory was written in a mature, advanced-English manner. He recalls feeling – and still seems to feel – that you can't just sit in a classroom without trying to make progress.]*

Richard: Yes, because we have less people in a class, here in Florida.

*[I observed class-sizes of anywhere from 55 to 92 students when I visited two secondary schools in Haiti in June 2004. It seems astute of Richard to make the connection between class-size and his own comprehension of the academic material in his third language, however.]*

Sheldon: When I first come to USA I did not expect to understand what is going on but after a while I began to understand.

*[Sheldon's statement, basically although indirectly about being patient with his own language learning, seems to stem from his quite- mature character and his excellent organizational skills, learned during his private-school education in Haiti.]*

Renaud: Yes I do. If you don't understand the teachers will help you understand the work if [you] don't want to learn you will just fail.

*[Renaud seems to be directly reflecting on his own behavior and its inevitable results. He failed more than half of his classes in the past two years of school. He has 10 academic credits when he should have 21.]*

Isaline: Yes, I expect to understand and I'm trying really hard for that to happen.

Sabina: Of course I expect to understand them if I don't expect to understand them what is the point of waking up early in the morning to come to school.

*[More indignance from Sabina, she is a very logical girl.]*

## Theme 7: Cheating

When asked simply, in question 17, "Is it OK to cheat?", 7 students (37%) out of 19 said that it's OK to cheat, and gave their reasons why.



Kenny: Sometimes it's OK to cheat in schools, because if it's the only way to pass a class. And if you cheat on a job in order to get a raise it's good.

*[I imagine I am not the only adult to find Kenny's last statement/opinion alarming.]*

Gerbert: If any say that they never cheated in life, that's a lie because if you in class the only way you get through your test is by cheating. So it is OK to cheat. So Ms. Pichard have you ever cheat in your life before, so you can get out something out of your way.

*[Gerbert challenges me personally to not lie about ever having cheated, since he feels that every single person must have done it at least once in their lives.]*

Johnson: I think it's OK to cheat because you know you are taking a test and you have a low grades and you didn't study for the test I mean you could cheat a little beat [bit]. Not everytime and always. I mean just once. Everybody cheat there's not a person in the world that doesn't cheat.

*[Johnson also feels that every single person in the world must have cheated at least once in their lives, and that this is normal. Note that Johnson has not yet passed the FCAT in reading.]*

Renaud: Well it not OK to cheat, but with no lie I maybe would do that one day if I'm takin a test and that would hurt me if I fail maybe I would

*[Renaud differentiates here between a moral stance and what he 'would do' if he felt he had to.]*

Ivan: When you don't no [know] something I guess it's OK to cheat.

Naomi: It's OK sometimes to cheat when you really have to. When you are desperate to past [pass] a class.

Robert: Not every time. Because when you cheat you don't get smart you get stupitder.

*[Robert is telling us that it's OK to cheat sometimes but to be aware of the consequences to your own brain.]*

The next two individuals are just more pragmatic about this issue of cheating, apparently admitting that it goes on regardless of what we/they think of it personally, and sometimes mentioning other kinds of consequences:

Madeline: No it's not OK, but people still do it.

Sheldon: No, because you can get in trouble if they catch you.

And finally, we have Sabina to sum up the group of students who say that cheating is never OK:

Sabina: No it's never OK to cheat no matter the consequences. Anyway what is the whole point of having 100 on a test that you cheat? I am pretty sure you are not going to be proud of yourself the same way as a student that have a fifty in the same test and did not cheat and [is] satisfied.

## Theme 8: Saving Face

There is only one question dealing with this theme, a straightforward one once we made sure that everyone in the focus group understood the idiomatic English expression "to save face". Seventeen students agreed that they did save face; most gave a reason, and we will see a sample of those reasons below:

### **19. Do you ever save face? How?**

Sabina: Yeah when someone give an explanation [sic] in English so I don't want the person [to] think I don't speak English I just say yeah I understand, but I really don't.

Radella: Sometimes, when the teacher asks you if you understand and you say yes because you're afraid of the others students.

Isaline: Yes, I did that a lot, I did it when I see everybody [knows] what to do and I don't.

Kenny: Yes! When somebody is talking about something I was supposed to know and I don't, I pretend to know it.

Ivan: Ack [act] like you understand but you don't really no [know] it.

*[Those five students expressed their fears of being humiliated in classrooms by their lack of understanding of English, even though the question does not mention anything specifically about understanding English. The preceding four questions in the focus set had not mentioned the English language, either.]*

Naomi: Yes because sometime when someone's talking about something like a teacher if they ask me if I understand I say yes because I don't want to bother them sometimes.

*[This idea of not 'bothering' her teachers is interesting from Naomi, since her classroom behavior usually seems passive and uninterested; it is difficult to know if we can take her comment at face value here.]*

Gerbert: When someone be talking to me for a long time and they say if I understand I just shook my head pretend I understand, that's the only way this person will stay quiet. But tell you the truth if that person tell me to do a resume about a things he said, I don't think I can do it.

*[This is typical Gerbert: wanting to silence others, especially adults who are troubling his 'rest'. But he is honest when he admits that he 'couldn't do a resume'.]*

Only two students dissented and said that they did not engage in face-saving behaviors. One gave a reason and one did not:

Johnson: No I like to stay the way I am and that's why people like me

*[I think Johnson is saying that he doesn't need to try to save face because people will like him no matter what he knows or doesn't know.]*

Rodney: No by not doing nothing

*[It is true that Rodney is very apt to 'do nothing' - if he doesn't understand things in classrooms, he rarely asks for clarification or repetition or help. He hates to have attention attracted to himself in classrooms. He seems to want to 'hide' by doing and saying nothing, which is really unfortunate. I suspect that there has been a pattern of prior humiliation of Rodney in classrooms in Haiti or in Florida, shutting him down as far as being an 'active learner' is concerned. We are learning very belatedly that he is really very bright and capable, and is an aural-style learner.]*

#### Theme 9: Availability of School Conditions Needed for Success

This is an important and rich two-part theme, involving four of the focus questions: 21, 22, 23 and 26. In theme 9A, questions 21 and 26 are about things (programs, opportunities) that ARE available in school, things which the students feel are necessary or important or helpful to their own success. In theme 9B, questions 22 and 23 ask the students to tell about things (programs, opportunities, people) which are not available to

them at school and which they feel are lacking, or things (people, opportunities, programs) which they feel are hindrances (not helpful, barriers) to their own success. The students' perceptions and reflections on these questions are part of the heart of my study. We will take the questions one by one in each sub-section due to the nature of the questions.

Theme 9A: What is present in school

We are looking first at the students' responses to focus question #21. The students' responses here give an overwhelming impression that it is the affective side of their lives at school which is the most important to them. All of the students without exception mention the word "teachers" or "people" or a specific person's name in their responses. They seem very conscious that there are adults at school who care about them, push them, and want to see them successful. The adolescent immigrant Haitian students are most conscious of the people surrounding them at school.

**21. What kinds of things that are in school now, help you to be successful? (Things, people, programs, classes, others?)**

Rodney: I think people make you successful.

Sheldon: Teachers, computer classes, math, and ESOL programs for the immigrants.

Kenny: Computers, teachers, and friends

Renaud: People that treat me with respect, and classes that I like.

Nancy: The ESOL classes help me to be successful. My teachers do many thing to help you [me] to be successful.

Johnson: The things that are successful and [in] school are the teacher that help and make me what I am know [now] and I thank them for that.

Gerbert: The teachers.... if it wasn't for you guys, I would never pass the FCAT. Thank you for waking me up, and also pushing when I am getting lazy. And I don't know how you can put up with me and thank you for not giving up on me.

Sabina: A lot of things I have a counselor that always be there to listen to me. I got people around me to help me with my homeworks when I don't understand. There is the clubs also that help me a lot because if you want to be on [in] it you have to keep your GPA high.

Ivan: They used Student Services to make student sweet.

*[This charming comment refers to the office of the deans of discipline. I don't know if Ivan really believes that he is made 'sweeter' by a visit to his dean after getting a disciplinary referral, or if he is being facetious.]*

Madeline: All my classes, and the Pine Manor Community Service where Mr. A. help me.

*[Madeline is referring to an after-school program run by a service organization in her neighborhood, not affiliated with the public school district, where late elementary, middle-school and some high-school-age students can get help with homework or can be tutored in different subjects.]*

Now we turn our attention to question #26, which asks the students if there are/were any opportunities at school that they did not take advantage of, and why they did not.

This was a good test of these Haitian immigrant students' awareness of the availability of programs and resources, and/or their awareness of the rules to get in to specific programs

(in the case of clubs and sports requiring a certain GPA). Their responses to this question also reveal that when reflecting about the past (opportunities that they have not taken advantage of), these students are clear on the cause-and-effect relationships leading to the reasons for their own non-participation. I was expecting the students to mention their transportation needs as a barrier to participating in after-school programs, but much to my surprise, they did not mention the relative lack of after-school free (public school) buses to get home. They do give different reasons why they did not take advantage of certain existing opportunities in or after school:

**26. Have there been (or are there now) any opportunities available at school, that you did not take advantage of? What kinds of opportunities? Why didn't you (why don't you) take advantage of them?**

Madeline: Yes there have, they had tracks but I could not take it because I had to work.

Gerbert: Scholar club it was available all year long. The reason I did not participate was, I have to go to work all the times.

*[Those are just two of the many who said they had to work.]*

Nancy: Yes, scholarship [sic], because I don't know how to apply for it

*[I believe that most of the LEP upperclassmen do not know how to apply for any of the scholarships, not even the ones designed for their minority groups, and there are no available school personnel to help them do so. It would mean going through each separate application and explaining almost every question to the students. Although this applying-for-scholarships could conceivably be done with groups of students all together, no one teacher has made this activity a part of their classroom 'curriculum']*

*as of yet. The one person staffing the Career Center is extremely busy serving all of the student body.]*

Wildy: I had a opportunity to play basketball my freshman yr. I did not play because I didn't have all my green card papers in.

*[Wildy is referring to an Immigration issue in the rules of the athletic association regulating public high school sports in Florida.]*

Robert: Play sports. Because my grade were to [too] low.

*[Robert is aware that he needs a 2.0 GPA to play sports in public high school in Florida.]*

Naomi: No because I don't really participate in school stuff.

Sabina: I think so because I remember last year when they organized the FCAT program after school I did not take advantage of the math when Ms. B. was explaining I was making fun of her and other kids. Now I am paying the consequences because if I paid attention to what she's been saying I would have passed the math FCAT right now and get it over with.

*[Sabina is very regretful about her own behavior. She has learned her lesson here.]*

Johnson: Because of the way I got treat[ed] and [in] school, because of the way they treat other kids that come from other countrie. [sic]

*[Johnson is a student who is very concerned with his perceptions of discrimination against minorities and/or immigrants.]*



## Theme 9B: What is lacking in school

This sub-section deals with focus questions 22 and 23. First of all we take a look at students' answers to question 22, which is asking them about things (opportunities, programs, people) which are NOT available in our school. Many students made specific recommendations based on their opinions about what is 'missing' or 'lacking':

**22. Are there any things that are not available at school, that you think would be helpful for you to be more successful? (Things or people or programs that the school does not have, that you think it should have?)**

Sheldon: I think you should have people to make the morals of the students so they can understand life better.

Richard: A class that teaches about Jesus.

*[These two students would like to see either religious education or some kind of 'morals'-probing class.]*

Naomi: After school program for homework help

*[Several more students mentioned the need for an after-school tutoring program.]*

Nancy: English team is one of them. They counselors in school must give us more attention.

Madeline: I think it should have different career classes for everyone.

*[I have noticed that only some of the female students mentioned needing more help from their guidance counselors, none of the males said this. But one definite gray area was*

*also mentioned previously: the need for scholarship counseling, or for extra help preparing college applications, or for career counseling and post-secondary planning.]*

Isaline: Yes, I think the school in U.S. should have that program for students who came from other countries, to not speak their languages in school.

*[Perhaps she means a full-time 'newcomer program' for ELL's.]*

Ivan: I think they need more technologie.

Wildy: There should be sport camp for all sports, for kids to get better.

And finally, we have one dissenting voice who made neither a recommendation for a missing program to be added, nor an affirmation that he wasn't lacking anything:

Vince: No, I'm allready succesful [sic]

*[Vince was not able to spell the two main words of his response after five years in the Florida public school system, and even though at least one of the words appeared on the page where he was writing. He has a very high level of self-esteem, possibly based on his successes in various varsity sports. I am not able to predict if he will succeed at passing the important diploma-level state Reading FCAT exam.]*

The last question of this sub-section asks the students to comment on whether there is anything in school preventing them from attaining success. They are very clear in their responses.

**23. Are there things (or people or programs) in school that are hindrances to your success? (Things that you think are not helpful to you, things that prevent you from having success?)**

Wildy: Suspension is not good or important, it make student lose school time

Madeline: When the kids are bothering me, it makes me wanna fight, plus having referrals.

Ivan: I have one class who make me unhappy.

Radella: I don't like the way they give us the FCAT.

Nancy: Yes, the FCAT. It have some people hindrances me, to my success, like the people who keep my score

*[She is referring to the fact that many high school LEP students' FCAT Reading scores were withheld and later invalidated by the state this past year at our school.]*

Richard: Yes, math, I don't think math helps me in any way

And then we have two dissenting voices who do not name hindrances, but who explain a different way of looking at things:

Sheldon: No, there is nothing that can prevent you from being success[ful].

Sabina: I don't think so because you have to face it, you must have people or things that stand [in] your way to keep you from achieving your dream, you are the one that should know what you want and try to avoid them, because that's life.

*[Sabina is talking about the idea that there are always going to be obstacles in life, and she feels it is for herself to overcome them or avoid them through her own efforts and willpower.]*

#### Theme 10: Parents' Beliefs About Education

The students were asked, in one focus question (#24), if they thought that their parents believe that their education is important. They are being asked to give their

opinion based on speculation about their parents' opinion(s). They were also asked to supply some evidence to "prove" or support what they are saying about this. In general, the students were unanimous in believing that their parents think that education is very important. The students of the focus group were also very proficient at supplying supporting evidence or good clues to prove their points in this section. They make both obvious and subtle connections between their parents' behavior(s) towards themselves regarding school and their school performance. A few make connections to their ethnic heritage as Haitians. They relate this to their parents being underprivileged or undereducated and wanting better lives for their offspring, giving them things that they didn't have themselves, etc. There is also some talk of financial ambition here.

**24. Do you think that your parents believe that your education is important, or not?**

**(What evidence makes you think this?)**

Sabina: Of course yes because my dad always make sure that we sleep on time at night to be able to wake up on the morning, always make sure that our homeworks is done. Make you don't miss the bus. Always contact Mr. A. to see how am I doing. When it comes to school my dad is very severe.

*[Sabina gives numerous supporting details about her father's behavior concerning her own schooling.]*

Robert: Because my parent always tell me to stay in school and lean [learn] some and get an education. If I don't what [want] to come to school they get mad at me

Madeline: Yes they believe education is important because [they] worry about my school grades. I think my parents believe my education is important because they don't want me to be like them without good education, especially Haitian parents.

Vince: ....they call the school to check.

Vogler: It's important to them. They wants to see me get a education. It be nice to get one.

*[This statement 'it be nice to get one' makes us wonder what it means to Vogler or his parents when they speak of 'getting an education'.]*

Radella: I think that my parents believe that, because my parents always want me to go to school, pass my test, and to be smart.

*['Wanting me to be smart' and 'wanting me to pass my test' seem like ingenuous statements from Radella, but she is always concerned with her image with others.]*

Kenny: Yes, because they always wishing that I have a lot of money

Nancy: Yes because they help, they want [me] to have a better job that they never had

Naomi: She always make sure that I go to school, if I'm absent to bring a note, my mom is very happy that I'm getting graduate that's the first good step

*[Naomi has graduated from high school, although without a standard diploma as she did not pass the Reading FCAT. I think that Naomi herself understands the difference in diplomas, but her parents might not.]*

Sheldon: Yes, because they spend money on you, and they work hard to get it, and provide everything you need.

Johnson: Yes I think that my parents believe that my education is important because they working hard they giving me things that they didn't have when they were my age so that give me evidence that they want me to have a better life than there's [theirs].

*[It is touching that these two males of different ages speak of their parents' sacrifices for them here in Florida.]*

Gerbert: Oh yes, because they always said education is the key to success. My evidence is if you go to college you earn money and respect.

*[Gerbert carries on with his twin themes, money and respect.]*

### Theme 11: Racism

We will only hear five students' voices in this theme. These are unsolicited comments not asked for by any of my focus questions or writing prompts. I believe that many more Haitian adolescent students would have written movingly about racism and discrimination themes if they had been prompted to do so. The students who did speak and write about racism and discrimination, feel very deeply about it, and are bitterly resentful of perceived discriminations against them as persons with black skin and/or as immigrants for whom English is not their first language. Johnson in particular makes a series of "they"-statements ('us and them'), statements in which the word "they" vaguely refers to the personnel of the Florida Department of Education (due to the FCAT exams), the local school system administrators, the State legislators, or American government figures in general. He and other students use the word "they" to refer to nebulous authority figures over whom they have no control and feel powerless to argue with.

Johnson: What's happened in my life right now. They think just [because] a kid is from another country can't score high in a test and have a high school diploma and go to college and be somebody in life. And I feel so mad about that, that the state doesn't care

about us, all they care about is that test {the FCAT} and that test is more important to them than us. They don't know if we, we are the future America, and we gonna represent these countrie [this country] when we go somewhere. They think that we no intelligent just because we speak another language and they don't know what they doing is racism. And they can't do that. They need to opened they eye and see the truth. They think all kids are the same and there's no difference between us but that's not true and we are American kids too.

Wildy: There are thing[s] that white people are able to do that black people can't. It is also racism how whites and blacks use violence to solve their problems.

*[Wildy observes that racial issues lead to violence, and also writes vaguely about inequity.]*

Madeline: Some of us black folks cannot get into a white school unless we smart, for example there's this college called Harvart [d], you don't see a lot of black people in there, why, because those people don't think us black folks have the brain for it, they think we low class, but we prove them wrong, because there are some black kids who made it to Harvart and are even smarter than the white kids that are there.

*[Madeline is alternately defensive and proud.]*

Robert: All of the thing of this school is right, only the people, sometimes some people didn't like someone else, there are people in this school some of them I think are not helpful for me.

*[Robert and the other Haitian students never choose to 'name names', but they have alluded to 'some people' being racist in their dealings with immigrant students.]*

Sheldon: “On a souvent besoin d’un plus petit que soi”. [French proverb: ‘We often need someone smaller than ourselves.’] This means that whatever the high [height] of a man, he always needs someone smaller to serve him.

*[The proverb itself simply refers to needing someone smaller to do a job – as in the fable of the lion and the mouse. Sheldon quotes it accurately, but then it is Sheldon who perceives the meaning to be, that everyone needs someone ‘to serve him’. In Haiti, with its class system and uses of totem-pole-like oppression, even relatively ‘poor’ people very often have servants poorer than themselves living in their homes and earning a few dollars a month. I assume that Sheldon, coming from the Haitian middle class, is aware of this practice and is tacitly acknowledging this Haitian reality.]*

## Theme 12: Thoughts of Haiti

This is another unsolicited theme, formally speaking, but which emerged from the writings of so many students when talking about their education or school-lives back when they were living in Haiti, and which fit right in to the original guiding question number 5. Most of these are sad memories of beatings and cruelty in their schools. But at the same time, many of the students are very homesick for Haiti and speak of it fondly or longingly. They acknowledge cruelties in Haitian schools, but at the same time they wish they could be “back home” in their familiar country, with their people.

Isaline: In Haiti, the teacher roop [whip] us for homework and lesson everyday, sometime you bleed. And they put us in the sun.



Kenny: In my school in Florida if I do something wrong they punish me but they are not as cruel as the Haitian teachers sentenced me. Because the law allowed teachers to whip students which I thought was like slavery.

Ivan: The problem I was in school in Haiti cause beating when you don't know your lesson. In Haiti they beat student at school and in USA they not.

Nancy: When I was in Haiti I have to always wanted to critic [criticize] the way they treated students. When I was in school in Haiti if I do something wrong they punish me in school in Florida when you do something wrong they send you to AS [IS or ISS = Internal Suspension room].

Sheldon: The children in Haiti, when their mom or dad are dead and their children go stay at some of their relative house, they treat them like their dogs, they make them do all the nasty things, they whip them, they do all kinds of things to them.

Kenny: Real life in Haiti, because in Haiti when kids and adults don't have the possibility to take care of themselves they go to some rich folks and tell them that they'll work for them if they feed them.

*[Both Sheldon and Kenny immediately above, are writing about their awareness of the Haitian phenomenon of "restavek" children – domestic slavery without any pay of poor or defenseless children, youth and sometimes adults.]*

Gerbert: [In Florida] The students be using profanity a lot in front of the teachers. In Haiti you can't be cussing. You can't say you are not going to do the work.

*[Gerbert makes valid comparisons about disciplinary issues and attitudes/behaviors towards respecting teachers.]*

Radella: In Haiti the teachers teach better than school in Florida.

Madeline: We want Haiti to be a clean place and we also wanna help Haiti get a better education.

*[Madeline quickly mentions just a few of the students' aspirations for their home country: improving its cleanliness and improving the educational system.]*

Sheldon: I would like to live in Haiti again. Everything is better in Haiti, for me. I think I could have a great life there. I know that I have to get some knowledge here first and make some money here first. Then I want to go back to Haiti to live. I could open a business and have my own business in Haiti. I could make plenty of money there in Haiti, as long as I go back with some money to start my business. My cousin told me that he is happy there and he has a good life, he is a student and he is happy in Haiti. I want to go back there to live after I get my education.

*[I believe that Sheldon is speaking from his emotions, from his homesickness, rather than from a rational belief that things are better in Haiti. His longing for his homeland, for the familiarity of the language, customs and people, for the cultural ambiance of Haiti, supersedes his recognition of reality-based measures such as the actual living conditions there: the lacks of potable water, electricity, medical care, education, justice system, roads, sanitation, or other infrastructures. He has only been in Florida for 18 months. Also, Sheldon believes that with some start-up capital, he will open a business – he has no specific area of business in mind – and profit off of other people in Haiti, the example that has been shown him all his life in Haiti.]*

### Theme 13: “Choosing Not To Learn”

Although their words are vague, this was not part of the original study, and there were no focus questions specifically asked about this, some of the focus-group students touch on issues of Haitian adolescents “choosing not to learn”. These statements fit into the last guiding question (#5) category of my research. Their writings are included on this, to add to the growing body of literature regarding minority youth underachievement and minority immigrants’ segmentary assimilation patterns to poor urban sub-culture; and with thoughts in my mind of working towards improving the future relevance of the public-school secondary curriculum.

Sabina: There’s some kids that is smart but they still talk, they still go to ISS, they are just don’t cooperate.

Madeline: It’s not that I am saying that us black folks are stupid because we not, some of just choose not to learn, some of us just fool around, but all of us are smarter than we know.

*[These two females make observations about kids’ behavior in classrooms, negative or disruptive behavior which does not reflect the reality of their “IQ” or potential to learn and succeed. Both seem to clearly believe that the students who do this are often still smart, but are just not cooperating with their teachers’ agendas.]*

Richard: I would have been an A student but because of my lazyness [sic] I didn’t try to be an A student.

Rodney: A lot of things I didn’t do. I am not telling, I was too lazy.

*[Many of the Haitian adolescent males are willing to refer to their own laziness, while females rarely admit to being lazy in school/work.]*

Wildy: You can just cheat off somebody!

*[It is very easy to choose not to do your own schoolwork.]*

Johnson: School doesn't have movie and video game room so kids can play in they free time.

*[This seems like a pipe dream which will never be fulfilled in a school setting. Indeed, I don't know if Johnson is being 'serious' here or not.]*

Renaud: I used to be bad in school.

*[This is an incredible comment, as if he were dismissing the 'bad in school' reputation as being a thing of the past, coming from a student who has a current GPA of 1.26 and only 10 credits, was just retained to repeat 11<sup>th</sup> grade, and failed 3 out of 7 courses his first semester and 4 out of 7 courses his second semester. Even though Renaud likes me and wants to please me, can he possibly be deluding himself into believing that I will somehow 'overlook' the reality-based measures like his F's, GPA and retention, when he writes of being 'bad in school' as a thing of the past?]*

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

*« Lemond pa bezwen konnen ki sa ou fè pou reyisi. Li pa bezwen konnen tou ki sa ki fè ou pa reyisi. Lemond se laviktwa ki li konnen. Degaje ou pou pote bon nouvel »*  
(Sixto, 1980).

[The world does not need to know what you did to succeed. It also does not need to know what made you not succeed. The world recognizes victory. Find a solution to bring good news.]

### Summary of the Study

The study looked at a subset of limited English proficient adolescent students, who are recent immigrants from Haiti. The factors and influences which impacted these students from their own background culture and society (this term could include culture and society in Haiti, or culture and society in the Haitian diaspora residents of Florida in the United States, or a combination of these) were linked and related to the adolescents' own perceptions regarding academic success, what it is and how to achieve it. Grounded in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, the connection was made that the students' perceptions and thoughts regarding success-related concepts are the basis for their behaviors in and around the school setting in their high school in Florida.

This study is a qualitative ethnography with a final focus group of 19 Haitian adolescent immigrant students attending a public high school in Fort Myers, Florida in 2004-2005. The school district has a population of some 75,000 students in all grades

and schools. The public high school where the Haitian adolescent focus group attended (or attends), starts every school-year with approximately 2000 students and ends with approximately 1900 students. Of these, the percentage of English language learning (ELL) students of all ethnicities ranges from 11% to 15% in any given recent year. The past three school-years running, the school has averaged over 110 students of Haitian origin per year, 80 to 100 of whom being of an LY (needing classroom ESOL accommodations and actively being served with teachers who are ESOL-endorsed) LEP status. The students in the final focus group of 19 were all LY status, needing daily accommodations and strategies, served in an ESOL program, all limited English proficient (LEP), or English language learners (ELLs), and have been in the United States for between 18 months and five years at the time of this writing.

The purpose of this study is to take us from consideration of the cultural and societal influences and factors impacting current Haitian adolescent immigrant students, to their perceptions about academic success in Florida – how to achieve it and what it looks like – and how these perceptions impact their behaviors. The idea that the perceptions and thinking of the Haitian students are important is framed by Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory, because their behavior is influenced by their perceptions. These Haitian adolescent students have their particular issues due to particular influences, which affect their perceptions; and their perceptions influence and direct their behaviors. Studying their perceptions matters, because: “If they believe this, then they will act on it”. From the influencing factors impacting the Haitian students, a bridge was made to their perceptions about academic success: what it is and how to achieve it. Studying the

perceptions of the Haitian adolescent immigrant students is important because their perceptions direct their behavior.

Grounded in Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning Theory, which relates behavior to perception, my focus in this study is that the Haitian adolescent immigrant students are sometimes acting on their perceptions, as opposed to Florida high school reality-based measures, when it comes to their view of success and how to achieve it. I examined how many of the Haitian cultural / societal / educational influences and factors have impacted these students' views, measures and perceptions of academic success, and I let them tell me what it (success) will look like for them, and how they will know when they have 'got it'. The perceptions of the adolescent Haitian immigrant students regarding their own success, told in their own words, are elaborated in my data chapter (chapter five). In considering and analyzing the students' responses, answers repeated by the same student in more than one data source were not given additional weight.

I examined the perceptions of, and beliefs about, the educational issues affecting their academic success, of adolescent Haitian immigrants who have arrived in the United States within the last five years. The purpose of this study encompassed my describing how a focus group of recently-arrived Haitian adolescent immigrants understand, explain, and possibly resolve the tensions between differing images of success. In the data analysis, I was dealing with the perceptions and beliefs of the immigrant Haitian students themselves, told and written in their own words. The over-arching research question I was asking is, "What do the adolescent Haitian immigrant students themselves identify as their perceptions, beliefs and issues impacting their own academic success in a Florida public high school?" (Or put another way: according to Haitian adolescent immigrant

students, what is the purpose of education and what does their success at this education 'look like'?)

The purpose of the study included the notion of better understanding what the Haitian students themselves identify as issues surrounding their own academic success in a public high school setting in Florida. The relationship was made between cultural/ social/ background-educational factors, their perceptions of these, and how they then act on their perceptions. These students were interviewed together and alone, orally and using written responses, using 26 focus questions. Their answers to these questions were then categorized and developed around 10 themes. An additional 3 themes emerged from the students' own concerns, making a total of 13 themes discussed in Chapter Five. The brief descriptions of each of the focus-group students were found in Chapter Three and in Appendix C; these descriptions are there to help us situate the individual students in terms of their assimilation to American culture, and their academic performances in 'real' terms, when we read the responses to questions in their own words in Chapter Five.

“The complexity of the issue of defining success for students...one crucial issue is who defines success for these students, how that success is defined, and what the consequences of such definitions are” (Sharkey & Layzer, 2000, p. 365). In this study, I am asking the focus-group students to define success – define it for themselves, for others, or in general. Naturally, since the students do not exist in a vacuum, their thoughts on these matters have inevitably been affected by hearing other people's thoughts. The students express what they think through their own filters, and in their own words, but they share and interpret frameworks from different communities: their



Haitian adolescent peers, their parents, the larger Haitian community (the diasporic one in North America, and the community in Haiti), the community of their American and other-ethnic peers in high school, their teachers in Florida and in Haiti, etc. Their interpretations and perceptions of these, in line with the Social Cognitive Theory, lead to their own behaviors in the high school setting. I cannot speak to the ‘consequences’ of the students’ definitions of success, as much as to the occasional mismatch between their definitions of success and their academic performance and functioning, when we use more standardized, reality-based measures such as their Grade Point Averages, results of FCAT Reading exams, results of Language Assessment Battery tests, assessments of their English-language reading comprehension and writing skills, etc.

“Parents and students should be included in the process of defining success. Critically examining notions of success could lead to a better understanding of the learning needs [of the students] and appropriate instructional strategies to address them” (Sharkey & Layzer, 2000, p. 365). Although I could not agree more with Sharkey and Layzer’s statements, in spite of multiple efforts and opportunities designed to include the local Haitian parents in the process of defining success for their children attending our public schools, my (and others’) invitations and outreaches to this community have not been met so far with anything which I could even remotely call ‘an audience’ or ‘partners in discussion’. I intend to persevere in my attempts to dialogue with the community of Haitian parents locally. As far as the second statement in the Sharkey and Layzer quote, this study has attempted to lead us to a better understanding of the Haitian adolescent students’ own notions of success, and hopefully to help us to eventually develop

appropriate instructional or curricular strategies to meet Haitian adolescent LEP students 'where they are' and aid them in making progress towards their goals.

“Teachers of second language learners must realize that these students have thoughts and feelings about important issues whether or not they are able to express them in English” (Deluca, 2004, p.277). I consider the identification of issues surrounding these students' perceptions (and eventual attainment) of success to be important, and the students' thoughts and feelings to be important as well, but we must also realize at least two other things. First of all, the focus group of students are expressing themselves during this study in their second or third language, and their lower levels of functioning in the English language are apparent, but should not detract from the content of their messages. Their statements can be poignant, powerful and revealing, even expressed in their L2 or L3, with all its weaknesses. Secondly, I am keenly aware that 'other adolescent Haitian students' residing in 'other places' and attending 'other high schools' might very well say 'other things' about the concept of success and how to attain it in their lives. I have chosen to use a qualitative, ethnographic format for this study, with students I have gotten to know very well over time, to probe their particular thoughts and feelings on these questions surrounding 'success'.

### Summary of the Findings

I have found that among the members of the focus group, the students' mindset is not *intentionally* pointed towards any goal of continuing to maintain “Haiti” and/or “Haitian attitudes” as their sole reference points. They are able to distinguish between

typically Haitian and typically more American frames of reference, when they discuss concepts such as ‘success’ or ‘attainment of goals’. They are able to indicate these distinctions with verbal markers such as the phrases “especially to Haitians”, “in Haiti”, “in Florida”, or “in [the] U.S.A.”. They seem willing and competent to perceive and to explain the more traditional Haitian viewpoints about society and education, while starting to embrace the American ones, or integrating the two cultures’ frames of reference where possible. They separate their frames of reference from those of their immigrant parents. In short, they want to assimilate and be successful here in the USA.

Returning to the guiding questions of my study, we can see how they have been addressed by the focus questions and the students’ responses to these. The fundamental question, “What do the adolescent Haitian immigrant students themselves identify as the issues for their own academic success in a Florida public high school?” remains the superseding umbrella under which the other questions fall. The five guiding questions are re-listed here:

1. What do Haitian immigrant students report that a successful student or a successful person should look, sound and act like?
2. How have Haitian immigrant students incorporated the concepts of literacy, content-area literacy, reading comprehension, and thinking/problem-solving skills into their perceptions and notions of success?
3. Do adolescent Haitian immigrant students, who have been formally educated in Haiti in French rather than in their Creole mother tongue, have certain expectations (positive, negative or neutral) for their own levels of comprehension of academic subjects in an American high school?

4. What other concerns influence the development of Haitian immigrant students' perceptions of their own academic success?

5. What other tensions, if any, do Haitian immigrant students report between Haitian societal and educational norms and beliefs, and American ones?

Now it is possible to consider the results of the analysis of their answers to these questions one by one.

1. What do Haitian immigrant students report that a successful student or a successful person should look, sound and act like?

This area was discussed in themes one and two, "Success" and "Good Grades". The students talked and wrote about what their 'success' will 'look like'. The positionality of the concept of success is often a postured or appearance-based one in Haitian society, and the focus-group students do not always exclude the use of corruption, ruthlessness or cheating to obtain (or be seen to obtain) this position of success. Having good grades is extremely important to them all. Many of them want good grades, apparently, just for the sake of having them, and give some non-reality-based reasons why good grades are 'important' for their success or their futures.

The students divide in half over the question of whether 'the appearance of success is as important as success itself', roughly half agreeing with this statement and half not. The half that do not agree, give logical reasons to support their statements, being more in favor of valid measurements of success. But the students who do agree with the statement about the importance of appearing successful, state that it is or means the same thing, or say that, for example, "being successful is very important in these [sic] society

today”, a statement which does not support or advance their opinion in a logical way. The students are also roughly divided in half on the perception or possibility of ‘looking smart’ and if/when/how such a thing can be done. They are not really able to discuss the idea of ‘creating an image of themselves’ (projecting a positive image) in any depth, however. They revert to discussions of clothing or appearance rather than studiousness or academic behavior.

The students of the focus group all apparently know (or report that they know) what they are ‘supposed to do’ in school, i.e., listen to their teachers, do their work, hand it in, don’t cheat, study for and pass tests; but among the members of this focus group we find students who don’t always DO what they ‘know’ they are supposed to do. There is a range of possibilities to explain these dichotomies between their reporting, their ‘knowing’, and their functioning, and it is possible that more than one of these reasons holds true in every student’s case:

- Are they poorly prepared by their schools in Haiti, and if so, is that dearth situated in content-area and general knowledge, or in thinking and problem-solving skills?
- Is the role and importance of achieving life-long literacy stressed in schools in Haiti?
- Do they need more overt explanations of the differences in academic expectations in high school in the USA as compared to their former schools in Haiti?
- Are they ‘great memorizers’ but don’t really understand what we mean when we talk of ‘comprehension’?
- Do they need to be explicitly taught more organizational and learning strategies in frequency, depth and breadth?

- Is the learning of secondary content-area subjects while they are within low levels of English-language functioning simply too much to ask of them?
- Is the secondary curriculum too irrelevant for their current realities and needs?
- Is the modern Floridian public high-school environment ‘deck’ stacked against them in too many ways at once?
- Even though they do ‘know’ what they should be doing in school, is it the case that they cannot find the intrinsic motivation to actually ‘do’ it?
- Is the underachieving, oppositional sub-culture too subversively attractive, or is its members’ look and style too appealing?
- Do they have enough adults and role models in their lives, or do they have a need for more mentors?
- Do they need a new orientation towards better academic-achievement focus styles, such as a need for positive peer role-models?

The list could be endless. More research work needs to be done, and there are many topics for further investigation and further lines of study.

The Haitian adolescent students define the meanings of ‘success’ and ‘successful’ in typically ‘standard’, ‘mainstream’ ways, such as we would probably hear from any adolescent, albeit often with words referring to appearances and/or money. Some of them identify ‘success’ as having reached a goal, some of them by someone’s appearance or dress, and many of them speak of ‘success’ in terms of having a lot of money.

The most important and notable differences that some of the students identified between Haitian societal/educational norms and beliefs and American ones **regarding success** were: 1) In Haiti, it really matters who you know. In Haiti, it takes having

governmental connections, rich relatives or other pulling of strings (corruption or bribery) to be 'successful', no matter how good an education one has managed to have there. It is almost impossible to be 'successful' in Haiti without getting involved in using one's connections; conversely, people in Haiti with connections can get 'successful' levels of jobs/positions even though they have had little or no education. Here, they are bereft of, and have to make do without, the usual Haitian string-pulling possibilities and 'influence networks'. And 2) In general, Haitian people are jealous of other Haitians' success or progress. One student wrote concerning the generality of Haitians that "they would rather see you poor and stupid like everybody else". The students of the focus group also identified other differences between Haiti and here in the USA, such as having more economic opportunities here, having more technology here, being able to practice your chosen career, getting financial aid for education, and not needing to practice rote memorization to succeed in school.

Many of the Haitian focus-group students have some trouble making logical cause-and-effect statements when it comes to their 'expectations' concerning their own future success. Very few of them mention 'hard work' (or effort, time, using their energy, persistence, motivation, etc.) as being a necessary prerequisite for their own success. They often make sweeping statements which indicate that they think they 'will be' successful, as if it were automatic and depended on nothing more than their desiring it.

A few students are very concerned with how other people think of them, using such terms as their 'reputation', or 'being good and nice', or 'getting respect', or 'wanting everyone to know who I am and what I can do'. They also refer to their clothing and their "looks".

In theme 2, the focus-group students are unanimously positive about the importance to them of having good grades. In the review of the literature section, there are some notes about the importance that good grades and high GPA's have to Haitian parents, to the exclusion even of issues like actually attending school daily or comprehending what is being taught/done in classrooms. The Haitian adolescent students continue to endorse the frame of reference that good grades are extremely important, crucial to their 'success', and some of them attribute other positive future results to good grades besides having them in and of themselves.

Regardless of their unequivocally positive feelings about the importance of getting good grades in school, these students are able to distinguish between 'getting good grades' and 'really learning', when they are asked that question directly. Several of the students mention the possibility of simply copying off their peers in order to obtain good grades, and explain the difference in knowledge that this practice of copying or cheating engenders; and several students also give explanations of what sort of proof could be asked of them to show that learning has really occurred.

2. How have Haitian immigrant students incorporated the concepts of literacy, content-area literacy, reading comprehension, and thinking/problem-solving skills into their perceptions and notions of success?

This area was treated in themes 3 and 4. There were five focus questions concerning these issues (three in theme 3 and two in theme 4). The students generally have not incorporated these concepts with their notions about success. The students do not really discuss their own levels of literacy, neither in their home language (Creole)



literacy, nor in French literacy (their L2) where it exists, nor in English literacy. They do not discuss literacy and reading comprehension as deeply necessary or important for their own success. With one distinct exception, they do not engage in discussion of English-language literacy as a real-to-them precursor to future success in the workplace or careers. They have few comments to make about literacy and reading comprehension: it seems not relevant to them; or they seem oblivious to it. They write in platitudes, with sentences like “reading is important”. They care about passing the Reading FCAT, but not about becoming ‘literate citizens’, and do not seem to incorporate the requisite comprehension skills for the passing of the Reading FCAT to any relevance in their future ‘real lives’. Perhaps their expectations vis-à-vis the usefulness or relevance or applicability of ‘academic’ vocabulary and language (that which they learn in English in high school), are rather low when seen from the perspectives of their usual work-places and outside-of-school needs. Perhaps they are unaware of (and hence, at this age/stage, unconcerned by) the levels of academic expectations that they will find if they do get into colleges.

3. Do adolescent Haitian immigrant students, who have been formally educated in Haiti in French rather than in their Creole mother tongue, have certain expectations (positive, negative or neutral) for their own levels of comprehension of academic subjects in an American high school?

This area was discussed in theme 5 and theme 6. In theme 5, all of the students identified the need to learn the English language “first”. They spoke of needing English in terms of school and also their future jobs and money-making potential. A few students

made other comments, like saying that Haitian newcomers have to “be a new person”, “find someone to explain to them what to do and what not to do”, and “get used to the school’s method, like the way they teach”. Many students mentioned the usefulness that they thought an after-school English-language tutoring program would have, or any kind of helping or tutoring program after school.

In theme 6, there are nuances here, of the members of the focus group ‘claiming’ to have understood the instruction in Haiti, which was in French, even though there is very little evidence that this was so. They are (with one possible exception) not able to carry on even banal conversations about ordinary subjects in standard French now; they have poor general knowledge overall (with three exceptions, two females and a male, all three of whom were educated in Haiti in private schools); they struggle with academic content on the high school level, content with which the majority of these students obviously has no prior knowledge or experience; and (except for the same three exceptions noted above) they have very poor reading and writing (literacy) skills in “any” language of the three of which we are speaking here. They are not ‘transferring’ their prior literacy skills (reading comprehension skills) from L1 or L2 into their English L3, because they have limited literacy skills to speak of in any language. For the majority, their current reading comprehension levels in English are situated between the second-grade and fifth-grade levels, and their current writing skills in English are generally on about the second or third-grade levels. Some of the students in the focus group have been in Florida for four or five years but are still situated at these levels of literacy. They do not use capitalization or punctuation or other conventions of writing in any language in which they write, and they often cannot formulate a coherent, complete sentence in a ‘standard’

manner in ‘any’ of their (two-three) languages, using a subject, a verb and an object. They do not consider the formation of verb tenses in English when they write.

Regardless of their English-language level, most of the students of the focus group say that they ‘expect’ to comprehend the instruction in their classrooms in Florida. Their understanding of, or their application of, the term ‘expectations’ (as something I think will happen, something I can predict will happen) seems to differ from Americans’ use of this concept. Many of these Haitian students seem to use the term ‘expectations’ to indicate something which ‘should happen’, something which ‘has to happen’, or something which ‘will definitely happen’ no matter what other factors are present. On the other hand, six of the students out of nineteen gave replies to this question which indicated their awareness of taking other factors into account before formulating their expectations, such as stating their awareness of their need to learn English words before understanding instruction in Florida classrooms.

4. What other concerns influence the development of Haitian immigrant students’ perceptions of their own academic success?

This question was addressed in themes 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11.

In theme 7, “Cheating”, ten out of nineteen of the written-response focus-group members reported that they “would” cheat if they thought that they “had to”, and these students – half of the group - also believe that “all people do cheat once in a while”. Almost half of the students mention cheating in connection with the idea of cheating sometimes being ‘the only way to get past an obstacle’ (whether that obstacle is passing a

test or a class, or in a career or job-site), and they accept cheating or even see it as a quasi-necessity in these cases.

In theme 8, “Face-Saving”, seventeen students of the nineteen in the written-response focus group agreed that they do save face, and they mentioned various reasons for this, and ways that they engage in face-saving. I believe that keeping a level of ‘face’ (dignity, respect, non-humiliation) with one’s teachers and peers is fairly typical of all adolescents; it is even more important to teenagers for whom English is not their first language; it is perhaps even more crucial to Haitian teens (than to “other” LEP students) to try to ‘save face’, due to their low incoming levels of literacy/reading comprehension/prior general knowledge, all of which they would probably like to be able to hide, disguise, or ignore.

Theme 9, “Availability in school of the conditions for success”, asks the students to talk about the availability in school of the various conditions needed for their own success. They talk about what is present and what is lacking. One of the important factors they mention as present is “the people, the teachers” – hence, the presence of the affective side, the caring adults, is crucial to their success. A few kids mention the ESOL program, the school-computers and the counselors as being helpful or necessary components for their academic success in this high school.

The students are able to relate which opportunities are available in school that they did not take advantage of, and their reasons for not doing so. Chief among these reasons is the need to work after school. Secondly, and of note, is the idea that LEP Haitian students do not know how to access career-counseling and scholarship-applications (or

financial aid applications) – career-planning help and vocational-directions advisement that they feel they need more of.

When discussing what is not available in this high school for their striving towards success-goals, the Haitian students mention two main factors: after-school programs are lacking (for tutoring either in homework-help or in English-language back-up); and again the subject of career-‘classes’ (career-counseling, post-secondary counseling and planning) comes up in several ways. I think that both of these are noteworthy ideas and areas which should be developed, with budgetary allotment for extra resources for secondary LEP students made available district-wide. Other students throughout this theme, particularly males, spoke of not being able to participate in any organized sports due to their lower GPA’s. I believe that inter-mural sports organization would give the lower-achieving students some additional and powerful reasons to stay in school and try their best.

When asked about hindrances to their own success, the main other topic that came up among the Haitian LEP students of the focus group, the thing which they said prevented them from having success in obtaining high school diplomas, was the administering of the state-wide FCAT Reading exam (which is only given in English).

In theme 10, “Parents’ beliefs about education”, the focus-group students unanimously believe that their parents think that their education is very important. They were easily able to give supporting evidence to back up their statements. A few students talk about their parents’ lack of education (although not in such blunt terms), and several mention that their parents equate the importance of education to making lots of money later.

In theme 11, “Racism”, in unsolicited comments, a few students write movingly (and sometimes bitterly) about racism or discrimination (institutional or societal) being a source of barriers, hindrances or impediments to their own success. Students use “they” to speak of nameless, faceless authority and power or systems. One example of such self-expression on this issue of perceived discrimination against Haitians (or blacks or minorities or limited English proficient students) is “The [FCAT] test is more important to them than us”.

5. What other tensions, if any, do Haitian immigrant students report between Haitian societal and educational norms and beliefs, and American ones?

This question was addressed in Chapter Five in themes 12, “Memories and thoughts of Haiti” and 13, “Choosing not to learn”. In theme 12, the students evoke memories of Haiti, including cruel forms of punishment such as beatings, whippings, or being sent to stay out in the hot sun. They also remember memorizing their lessons and having to recite them in school the next day, with mixed feelings. A few students believed that they learned ‘better’ through memorization and that the teachers in Haiti ‘taught better’.

Finally, in theme 13, several students speak of Haitians “choosing not to learn”. There are a few astute comments from the kids, comments which remind us of the scholarly works on minority adolescent immigrants’ segmentary assimilation to the oppositional sub-culture which rejects academic achievement. Although these focus-group teens of my study have never read any scholarly works, they are able to perceive

and comment upon Haitian students who choose not to comply or do their work at school, and commented upon the phenomenon of underachievement in their own words.

### Summary of the Results

The Haitian adolescent immigrant students are able to speak purposefully, cogently, powerfully and coherently (English-language skills permitting) on numerous questions surrounding their thoughts and perceptions about their own success, academically or in their future careers. If we re-examine the guiding question, “What do the adolescent Haitian immigrant students themselves identify as the issues for their own academic success in a Florida public high school?”, we can see that these students are able to define and discuss issues, make plans and recommendations for their own success, and state what is available/helpful and what is lacking for them in their high school.

### Recommendations

I would like to make some suggestions for the reorganization and implementation of certain educational resources for these Haitian adolescent students, and also to make recommendations for future research, based on the implications of my study.

I believe, with the students, that there should be more emphasis on their English-language learning in their first semester or year in Florida. In short, I believe that they would be best served by an adolescent “Newcomer Program” in the school-district, with

full-time English for Speakers of Other Languages courses (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and learning strategies) until these students are more able to engage effectively in the comprehension of secondary-level content-area courses, with their heavy vocabulary load and complicated assignments and assessments. In the course of their life-times, and given their prior educational history in Haiti, it cannot really ‘matter’ if students such as these do not take Biology or American History (for example) in their 10<sup>th</sup> grade year or in their sixteenth year of life. It would not be out of compliance with the Florida Consent Decree (1990) to allow secondary students who are beginners in English to engage in full-time English language learning for a short period of time, until assessment measures reveal that their ability level permits them to move into mainstream secondary course-work in one of the district high schools. In future research, I would like to observe the effects of such a newcomer program on secondary-age LEP adolescent immigrants, especially those from limited formal educational backgrounds. Many problems could be solved in one place by the presence of a Newcomer Center for the incoming students: a) an intensive period of English language immersion; b) diagnostics of existing incoming levels of literacy in the native language(s); c) informed recommendations to the students, towards the end of their stay at the Newcomer Center, as to appropriate high school grade-placement and college- or vocational-orientation goals; d) a place to organize efforts to communicate effectively with the parents and larger community.

I believe that in their first two years’ presence in Florida schools, Haitian students would best be served by organized (weekly or monthly) sessions of overt explanations and discussions of the differences they are encountering between their former schools in Haiti and their school system in Florida. American school systems, institutions of higher



learning, and careers are usually run as 'meritocracies'. We do not depend on governmental or institutional corruption or string-pulling in the USA to get to successful positions. The students need thoughtful explanations from concerned educators, and they need them to occur in Creole (or translated into Creole) for best results. Discussing openly the differences between our schools (and how we arrive at our success-goals) could only serve as a mechanism for clearing the air, and for providing them with adults with whom they can 'safely' ask questions, receive understanding of their needs and confusions, or get more feedback as time goes on. The need for the continuing presence of enough competent Creole-language translators would be essential to this and any other endeavor concerning this population of students. A future qualitative study would look more deeply at the results of structured conversations with Haitian students about the differences between our two schooling methods.

I would also like to wean these students off of their 'need' for cheating, by providing the conditions for success which render cheating unnecessary. This comment goes for the micro level (the individual classrooms) as well as for the state level (the FCAT, the TABE, or any other standardized testing administered in English language only). Perhaps a future follow-up study on institutional racism/discrimination would focus more deeply at the specific concerns of underprivileged minority ELL students such as Haitian-born ones.

Obviously there is much to be gained from a focus on improving Haitian parents' participation in their children's educational success issues in Florida. A part of their participation includes the need for more targeted efforts at adult education classes (English, literacy, computers, workforce-training, etc.) for this very vulnerable population

of adults. It is difficult to foster a buy-in to the ideas of life-long literacy goals with their children, when the parents themselves don't know what we're talking about. Another part of the focus is simply seeking more ways to get the Haitian parents to come to school, come to meetings, come to information sessions, and for them to become informed and understand how our school-district grading, promotion, attendance, and disciplinary systems work in Florida.

“We need to build a broader research base on how to best facilitate learning in the programs that exist in secondary schools. We need to think more about materials and methods that are appropriate and effective for adolescent second language learners” (Deluca, 2004, p.278). This citation reminds me of the constant underachievement I observe among teenage Haitian students, most particularly the males, but a few females too. These students are living in the danger zone: low literacy, low English language skills, low grades, poor prospects for a ‘standard’ high school diploma, poor prospects for college, and poor prospects for a decent job paying a living wage. A pilot project (with a research component) could be done locally using an After-School Tutoring Program as the springboard for ‘turning around’ Haitian adolescent underachievers into truly successful young people.

Teacher education in the form of targeted professional development workshops (for inservice credit) could be given as stand-alone, overview courses in any county about this specific population of immigrant learners. If many high school teachers are under-informed about their Haitian students’ educational backgrounds, and the social history and current living conditions in Haiti, enhanced knowledge of their students’ needs and their backgrounds would help the teachers to better aid their Haitian child and adolescent

students towards their learning goals. Curricular goals and learning-strategy goals for these students would be formulated with more clarity of vision.

Finally, a study could be done examining, implementing and assessing a pilot program which increases the career-counseling and vocational-planning resources available for these older secondary LEP students. In most Florida high schools, there is one adult functioning as overall 'career counselor' for student bodies of 2000 teens or more, making this counselor a precious resource, and forcing the students' needs for his/her time and attention to be more and more jostlingly competitive. LEP students, particularly those with extremely reduced comprehension of English and/or of what they are able to read, and those with 'no' prior knowledge of American systems of functioning/advancing towards their career-goals, are highly vulnerable to being lost in the general shuffle of a large high school, and are very labor- and time-intensive with their many needs. Clearly, no "one" career counselor can be monopolized to serve all of the Haitian students' needs "alone," for example. It takes more than an hour to fill out only one student's financial aid application, one college application or one scholarship application. Additional personnel and specialized resources are needed in this area of future-directions counseling, including speakers of the home language (Creole) as translator and interpreter, cultural and educational/systems negotiator and bridge-builder. One option is that a program of vocational-counseling and career-planning for English language learners could be developed as a time-sharing arrangement (sharing of the personnel and resources) between two or more high schools.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider this research study.

**APPENDIX A:  
FOCUS QUESTIONS**

## Focus Group Interview Questions

1. What does a successful student look, sound and act like?
2. Is it true that the appearance of success (looking like you are successful) is more important than success itself?
3. What makes a person successful? What does it mean to be successful in your career?
4. Some people think that you've got to 'look smart'. How do you 'look smart'?
5. Is it important to get good grades in school? Why?
6. Does getting good grades mean that you have really learned something?
7. What is the difference (is there any difference) between getting good grades and really learning?
8. Are there any conflicts (contrasts, differences) between ideas about success in Haiti and ideas about success in the United States?
9. What is the relationship (link) between reading comprehension or literacy, and future success? (Is there any link?)
10. Were you expected to do a lot of independent (critical) thinking and problem-solving when you were in your school in Haiti?
11. Do you see any difference in the amount or type of independent (critical) thinking and problem-solving that you have to do in your school in Florida, from what you had to do back in school in Haiti?
12. When Haitian students first arrive in school in Florida, what do they have to get used to, learn to do, or change (most urgently) in order to do well in school?

13. When you were in school in Haiti, were your teachers teaching in Creole or French most of the time? If it was in French, did you understand the instruction?
14. Do you expect to understand what is going on (the instruction and the assignments) in classrooms in the USA?
15. Do you expect to be successful as a student? Why or why not?
16. Do you expect to be successful at your future job? Why or why not?
17. Is it ever OK to cheat? When? (In school, in what situation? On the job, in what situation?)
18. Is it a goal to create an image of yourself to show to other people? How do you create your good or bad image? How do you make other people believe in it?
19. Do you ever save face? How?
20. Is there any link between learning English and success in the United States?
21. What kinds of things that are in school now, help you to be successful? (Things, people, programs, classes, others?)
22. Are there any things that are not available at school, that you think would be helpful for you to be more successful? (Things or people or programs that the school does not have, that you think it should have?)
23. Are there things (or people or programs) in school that are hindrances to your success? (Things that you think are not helpful to you, things that prevent you from having success?)
24. Do you think that your parents believe that your education is important, or not? (What evidence makes you think this?)
25. Is there any link between your education and your future job/career?

26. Have there been (or are there now) any opportunities available at school, that you did not take advantage of? What kinds of opportunities? Why didn't you (why don't you) take advantage of them?

**APPENDIX B:  
THEMES**



- I. Theme 1: “Success”
  - 1A: Success and its meanings
  - 1B: Success and its appearance
  - 1C: Success and expectations
- II. Theme 2: “Good grades”
  - 2A: Good grades and their importance
  - 2B: Good grades versus really learning
- III. Theme 3: “Reading Comprehension / Literacy”
  - 3A: Reading comprehension and its link to ‘success’
  - 3B: Reading comprehension and its link to students’ futures
  - 3C: Reading comprehension and success in English-language literacy
- IV. Theme 4: “Types of thinking done in schools in Haiti and Florida”
- V. Theme 5: “What Haitian students have to do/learn when they first arrive”
- VI. Theme 6: “Languages and Expectations of Understanding”
- VII. Theme 7: “Cheating”
- VIII. Theme 8: “Face-Saving”
- IX. Theme 9: “Availability in School of the Conditions Needed for Success”
  - 9A: What is Present in school
  - 9B: What is Lacking in School
- X. Theme 10: “Parents’ Beliefs about Education”
- XI. Theme 10: Theme 11: “Racism”
- XII. Theme 12: “Memories and Thoughts of Haiti”
- XIII. Theme 13: “Choosing Not to Learn”

**APPENDIX C: NARRATIVE DESCRIPTIONS OF 19 FOCUS-GROUP STUDENTS**

1) “Johnson” is a male senior who graduated from school on May 18, 2005. I use the term ‘graduated’ loosely here, because Johnson received a certificate of completion, not a standard diploma. He had more than enough high school credits (27.5), excellent attendance over the four years of high school, no disciplinary problems whatsoever, a GPA of 2.30, and he passed the Math FCAT exam but not the Reading FCAT. He intends to continue trying to pass the Reading FCAT by taking it at every opportunity (the exam is administered yearly in mid-October, early March and mid-June). He did show up for the June test-administration a month after graduation. Johnson is a tall, handsome, stocky and extremely quiet, soft-spoken and gentle young man. He is known for keeping himself to himself and never getting involved in quarrels; his behavior is very mature and although he is outwardly serene, I realized that Johnson is also very anxious about his grades and performance evaluations of any kind. Not passing the Reading FCAT repeatedly is making him neurotic, and he now complains of frequent nightmares. His last FCAT score in the Reading exam was only 3 points from the passing score. He feels strongly and complains very bitterly about racism in America towards Haitians and/or blacks and/or all immigrants, as we shall see in Chapter Four in the speeches and writings from him. I suspect that he is several years older than his school birth certificate indicates him to be (if we assume that a high school senior would be 18 or 19, I believe that Johnson is more near 22 or even 24). He has been in the USA for five years and dresses in fashionable male-outfits, but not the extremes of rapper-styles. His English is on approximately a mid-to-high-intermediate level, and in pronunciation, his foreign accent is limited (he is easy to understand when he speaks English). His writing skills in

English are what I would consider to be “poor” for a high school senior, with many errors of grammar, orthography and even syntax.

2) “Wildy” is a tenth grade male who seems extremely assimilated into mainstream American culture; his English has virtually no foreign accent (which pronunciation skill could be explained by his arrival in Florida at approximately age 11, during middle school) but a slight African-American Ebonics tendency in his speech patterns; he has a GPA of 3.36 and is proud of his A-B school average. So although he dresses more or less in high-fashion urban-rapper African-American styles, he is a high achiever in school. Wildy has excellent school attendance and grades, and I know that all of his teachers enjoy and appreciate him. He gets along well with everyone, both males and females of his peer group like him. He is highly social and ‘can be’ led astray (or lead his peers astray) into off-task behavior in classrooms, depending on the composition of students in the rooms; but Wildy is compliant with teachers and doesn’t wish to get into disciplinary trouble, so he will settle down to work when specifically reminded to do so or when separated - by alternate seating arrangements - from his peers. He did not pass the tenth-grade Reading FCAT on his first attempt (March 2005). I believe that he really is 16 years old now, has been in the USA for five years, and is heading into 11<sup>th</sup> grade with a positive self-image overall.

3) “Sheldon” is a quiet, conscientious 11<sup>th</sup> grade boy who arrived from Haiti in January 2004, and has been in Florida for 18 months at the time of this writing. Sheldon is extremely attentive to teachers in classrooms, with his eyes always shining on ‘high beams’; he seems very focused on his education in a consistent manner, through his speech and his actions, which informs us of his intrinsic motivation. His English is on a

low-intermediate level with a heavy speaking accent; I frequently have to ask him to repeat to me what he wishes to say three or four times. He has an A-B average, works extremely hard in all his classes to earn it, and has a 3.52 GPA. I have gathered through conversation that he attended one of the ‘better’ private schools for boys in Port au Prince, Haiti, and comes from a middle-class background. Sheldon is highly literate in French, perhaps was even on an American-equivalent ‘grade-level’ in French in reading and writing when he arrived in mid-10th-grade year, although we do not do testing in French for incoming evaluation purposes. He did not pass the first attempt at the Reading FCAT in March 2005, which I attribute almost solely to his language barrier issues and acquisition of L3 English after – in March – only 14 months in Florida. I have a very high regard for Sheldon, he is (secretly) one of my favorites due to his attentiveness, his quiet subtle humor, his sincerity and his work ethic. He dresses in brand-name t-shirts and comfortable jeans or shorts belted near his waist, not urban-rapper-look trendy clothes. I have gotten the vague impression that his father is strict with him about clothing, comportment and getting good grades. According to another teacher who works with him, “[Sheldon] has chosen to transcend [those anti-school influences] ever so nicely while maintaining a level of “street credibility” for his classy behavior”. (J. Kulie, personal communication, 2006).

4) “Rodney” is a very tall, large boy who ‘should’ be a football player. He has been in Florida for four years and has just finished his 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Rodney comes from a very poor working-class background in Haiti. He is somewhat behind on academic credits and his very-low GPA is 1.47, a matter of some concern since the graduation requirement state-wide is to achieve a 2.0. Rodney started out in high school in his ninth grade year

and half of his tenth grade year by getting poor grades, failing most of his classes, and having a very bad attitude (oppositional, resentful and angry, prone to fits of rage in classrooms and many discipline referrals). Teachers were afraid of Rodney and had no idea how to handle him or what to do to serve his various learning needs, “whatever they were” (I think that was the general attitude – Rodney was considered extremely difficult and as if he had too many needs to be able to make any progress at all). He seemed to have global educational-mismatch problems on a major-league scale; at the time even I thought he may have qualified for Exceptional Student Education child-study/psych testing services. I have known him since his 9<sup>th</sup> grade year, when he had only been here for a year (his “ugly” 9<sup>th</sup> grade, as I think of it nowadays); since that time, Rodney has completely turned himself around into a sweet and compliant personality, a gentle giant, respectful, hopeful to do well, trying to do his best in all his academic classes. It took him about two years to make sense and meaning of the American high school way of doing things, and to be able to function within the outer and the hidden curricula. He still experiences problems comprehending math and science classes in particular (he has failed Biology repeatedly) and has specifically expressed to me, “I didn’t learn any of that science stuff in Haiti and I have no idea what Mr. B. [the teacher] is talking about.” Rodney’s English is mid-to-high intermediate in oral/aural, with a good accent in speaking (much improved from three years ago), his reading comprehension is mid-intermediate in English but his writing skills are what I would characterize as “poor”, with many syntactical and spelling errors as well as having constant mechanical errors of conventions like punctuation or capitalization. Somewhat to my surprise (and to my great joy), Rodney passed the Reading FCAT on his third try, this past March 2005. I

believe that Rodney really is now the age he stated for school, 18, but it is difficult to tell with him, since he is so big and tall. He dresses in non-extreme but fashionable, matching-accessorized urban-look young-male-outfits.

5) “Clarence” is a gangly boy from a working-class family of five brothers who are here alone with their father, and he has had his hands full with managing them. Clarence just graduated from high school in May of 2005 with a GPA of 2.56 and a real standard diploma, since he had passed the Math and Reading FCAT exams. (It is surprising to me that Clarence passed the state Reading test.) Clarence has been in the U.S. for 3 years, and his English skills range is mid-intermediate, with slightly lower writing skills. I am acquainted with all of the brothers except the youngest, who has not yet come to high school. Frankly, they are all rather odd and unpredictable, with abrupt patterns of speech (blurting things out suddenly) and jerky mannerisms. The two oldest brothers, Clarence and Mitchell (not part of this study), both have heavy Creole accents when they speak English. Clarence means well, he did his work to the best of his ability, and was generally easy-going and well-liked. He got into disciplinary trouble occasionally with teachers, but often due to the escalation of verbal misunderstandings, which I suspect were related to his language barrier. Clarence dresses in extremely segmentary-assimilated, poor-black-urban rapper/ghetto styles and doo-rags (hair bandannas) or other trendy head-gear. I believe Clarence to really be his school-birth-certificate age of just-19. I do not know what his career-goals are, or if he has formulated any.

6) “Kenny” is a very tall fellow of 17 and a half (which I believe to be his real age), who has only been in Florida for exactly 18 months at this writing. He entered our high school in January 2004 as a monolingual, and was assigned by School Choice to be a 9<sup>th</sup>

grader, but mid-way through this past school-year, he retroactively received academic credits from his Haitian school transcripts, advancing him into the 11<sup>th</sup> grade according to his credit-history, so he will be a senior this August of 2005 and hopes to graduate in the spring of 2006. Kenny has not passed the Reading FCAT after one attempt, in March 2005, and his advancement to 12<sup>th</sup> grade due to his retroactive credits-assignment may turn out to be a handicap for him as concerns numbers of chances to take the FCAT exam before graduation next spring – he only has two more opportunities instead of five. He functions in English on an overall mid-intermediate level, with no area (listening, speaking, reading or writing) being a weaker area, although he does have a Creole accent when he speaks. I have understood through conversations that Kenny comes from a middle-class family in Haiti and has had a ‘good’ classical-French education at a private school in Port au Prince. Kenny began working at a restaurant in the evenings in the spring of 2005 and his school grades really suffered due to this first experience in the work-force. His academic average plunged from high A-B to low C-D this past semester, leaving him with an overall 3.10 GPA. Kenny does not dress in extreme urban-ghetto-rapper styles, but rather in brand-name t-shirts and jeans belted near the waist; his assimilation to America seems moderate and middle-of-the-road so far.

7) “Vogler” is a short and stocky male who just graduated, not with a standard diploma, this past May of 2005. He did not pass the Math or the Reading FCAT exams. His GPA is 2.24 and he had enough academic credits, good attendance, and received a high school ‘certificate of completion’ for now. He has a reputation as a womanizer who went out with many girls at once, preferably girls of Hispanic or white origin, but also Haitian girls. He has been in Florida for four years. His dress is fashionable but



moderate in style, no extremes, no real ghetto-rapper looks. He is very easy-going, very nice and respectful, smiling, compliant, and always tried to do his school-work to the best of his ability. His English is mid-intermediate or higher, with a good accent (his English is fairly easy to comprehend for the American auditor). Although his birth certificate used for school would make him 18 and a half at the time of graduation, I believe he may be a couple of years older, maybe about 21. Vogler always got teased for his physical looks, short with very dark skin, a very broad large nose, etc. but since he is easy-going and friendly, he took a considerable amount of teasing from his Haitian classmates/peers in remarkably good spirits without getting into fights. I believe that Vogler did a lot of successful face-saving when it came to what he did or did not comprehend in English in classrooms, so teachers (myself included) were fooled as to his real level of English functioning.

8) “Vince” is a good-looking young man who is shaping to be a fine athlete in multiple high school sports, with a natural ability. He is on the varsity football, soccer and track teams and is making a good name for himself locally. He just finished his 11<sup>th</sup> grade year. He has a GPA of 2.73 and was promoted to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, but he has not yet passed the Reading FCAT. His English is high-intermediate all-around, except for his writing skills, which are much lower. Vince could do better in school but he rarely applies himself to academics. He has been in Florida for five years and considers that he doesn’t need ESOL classes any more, and it is true that his English is only faintly Creole-accented in his speech, but since his test-scores on the Reading FCAT and the annual LAB (Language Assessment Battery) test continue to be non-passing, he is still being served as an LY student. Vince is very lazy, and he admits this, but he is polite,

respectful and easy-going with adults. The football team has been the best thing for him as far as his work-ethic and GPA improvement are concerned, in my opinion, as well as being an assimilation path leading to another kind of recognized success in the USA, sports and athletics. He dresses in very moderate styles, wearing fashionable brand-names but casually, never in urban rapper/gangsta extremes. I believe him to be a year or two older than his stated 18 years, but it is hard to tell with Vince, so maybe not.

9) “Robert” is an underachieving male who was retained and will be a repeat 11<sup>th</sup> grader this coming year. He has a low GPA of 1.57 and only 13 academic credits. He has not passed the Reading FCAT. He dresses in the extremes of urban rapper/gangsta fashions, with his pants or shorts down below his rear end, t-shirts a mile long, wearing heavy expensive chains and jewelry, and doo-rags or other trendy urban black-male headgear. Every expensive, brand-name outfit he owns matches from top to bottom. Robert has been in Florida for four years but his English skills are uneven, with a high level of oral/aural and a very low level of reading and (especially low) in writing...perhaps he can write on a third-grade level in English, if that, with many mistakes of grammar, conventions, spelling, etc. His speech accent is not very heavy, just a slight Haitian-Creole accent, very understandable, with a tendency towards African-American Ebonics speech-patterns of grammar and pronunciation. Robert is assimilated in a segmentary way, I would say. He is pleasant, even charming. He smiles and grins a lot, he also sings and dances both Haitian music and American pop or rap music in classrooms (which is rather inappropriate at times); he is merry and friendly. He never, but never, has his work, his assignments, any paper, a pen or pencil, any book or notebook – he drifts in every hour of every school-day to classrooms empty-handed and

carefree, but smiling and happy to see one. He also tends to get out of his seat frequently, he roams around classrooms unless checked by an adult, he socializes, he has a hard time settling down and appears/acts rather “ADHD”, informally speaking. He is always respectful to me, although I heard he had a few run-ins with teachers over respect and behavior issues. Robert seems/acts very immature for his age.... which is supposedly 17 going on 18, but I cannot tell at all with him and have had no conversations speculating on his true age. His behavior and general goofiness would be considered academically immature in most American schools for an 8<sup>th</sup> grader, much less an 11<sup>th</sup> grader who ‘should be’ a 12<sup>th</sup> grader. His conversations with me and with the Haitian paraprofessionals over time indicate that he means well and has good intentions, but he never follows through, never brings up his grades or GPA, never brings completed assignments to teachers, fails classes frequently, etc. I know the family, a middle-class family with two older sisters who did very well in school, really ‘model students’. Robert began bringing an expensive personal DVD-player to school during the last quarter, and playing movies or games on it in classrooms, which of course is forbidden, and which even further complicated and reduced his chances to be paying attention to academic instruction in classrooms. His possession of this expensive “toy” made him the object of much attention (admiration?) in school from his Haitian peers, in spite of it having been confiscated regularly. Due to his low reading/writing skills, his flighty attention span, his low GPA and low number of credits, Robert is one of the cases who I worry about – what is going to become of Robert? Does he have any hope for a real high school diploma? What will he become or do after high school?

10) “Richard” is a handsome senior who graduated without a high school diploma due to the Reading FCAT. He did try to take the exam again in June after graduation. He had enough credits, good attendance, and a GPA of 2.54. He has been in Florida for 5 years and is very assimilated. His assimilation is middle-of-the-road; he does not speak Ebonics or dress like a rapper in extremes of ‘ghetto’ fashion, but nor is he overly conscientious about his academics. He dresses in trendy outfits or fashionable name-brand t-shirts and jeans. His English is quite good all-around, with no noticeable Creole accent. I believe that Richard is really the 18-and-a-half of his ‘school’ birth certificate. He is lazy and easy-going, and has always been respectful to me, as well as attentive, participating and interested most of the time in my class. He has had discipline issues in other classrooms or school hallways, enough for the deans to get to know him on sight. He can get off track in the classroom through socializing with his peers, talking, or immature playing and laughing. Then later he regrets not doing his work, not turning assignments in on time, not typing his author-report, etc. when he sees his bad quarterly grade. He is very interested in race relations, discrimination and tolerance studies, religious and comparative religious studies, and generally in thoughtful discussions about modern society or modern life, where he is a major participator in classroom conversations. He is open to discussion and does not have a chip on his shoulder about his black identity, as long as a feeling of mutual respect has been established. If the reverse should happen, he is scowling and resentful. He mostly acts like an African-American without the Ebonics speech dialect. He comes from an extremely religious working-class Haitian family and is struggling with the strictness and the beliefs of his family’s Christian sect, struggling out loud in the presence of listeners, as it were.

Richard is the only student in my focus group who felt that public school should have “a class that teaches about Jesus”. I thought that Richard and I got along very well and I enjoyed having him. He was “game” to try any new classroom activity, to get up in front of his classmates and do a charade of a vocabulary word (something that more than half of my Haitian students are too shy to do), he was pleasant and fun to have in the room.

11) “Gerbert” was the class clown, the complete cut-up. He is very assimilated and has been in Florida for five years. He has only a very faint accent when speaking English. He is thin and very lanky, with chipped front teeth. He just graduated in May of 2005 with a real standard diploma and a 3.00 GPA; he passed the FCAT Reading exam on his last chance in March 2005. This news, which arrived three weeks before graduation, was the occasion for much high-spirited rejoicing. He is bright, funny, and very, very easy-going. He can be lazy, but we worked on that tendency throughout his senior year through serious conversations one-on-one or two-on-one. He has stated his gratefulness to myself and to the Haitian paraprofessional for our continued concerned prodding of his work-ethic and in order to get him to take life/academics more seriously. Gerbert is a really good kid; I believe that under his easy-going exterior is a fine and just person. He was educated in French in Haiti. He loved to speak Creole in the classroom to tease and/or test me; he also made it a habit, in spite of his excellent English, to actively engage with and discuss our classroom literature selections with his Haitian peers by speaking in Creole about them. It seemed like the entering-into-literature discussions in Creole (which I permitted sometimes in my ESOL room) were a novelty for Gerbert, one he relished and explored. I could see upon meeting his parents that they come from a poor or working-class background and are still very limited in their own

assimilation to Florida, and in their own English language skills, which would explain Gerbert's frequent writing in the classroom on intergenerational issues and misunderstandings. He dresses in fashionable brand-name t-shirts and jeans or shorts belted near the waist, in a moderate style, nothing extreme. He voices more mainstream types of success-aspirations, and has not really manifested segmentary assimilation to the poor urban African-American subculture. Nevertheless, he often has cultural clashes within his family. I believe that he is really the age on his school birth-certificate, turning 19 now.

12) "Ivan" is our soccer star, and every coach who has seen him says he is a truly gifted player, but we worry about his lack of really quantifiable academic progress and also his extremely slow rate of L3 acquisition. Ivan's English is very low-intermediate, perhaps false-beginner level in all four areas of language skills. He has been in Florida for two and a half years. His pronunciation of English is poor and heavily accented; frequently he gives up attempts at communication and turns to the Haitian paraprofessional for translation back and forth in Creole instead. He has been promoted out of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, but barely, and is going to be a struggling senior this coming year who will need to pass every class he takes with high grades (in order to get his GPA of 1.89 up to the state-required 2.0, which seems a real stretch, and in order to have the minimum 24 credits required to graduate). I can't imagine how his ability in soccer will bear fruit on higher levels unless his English acquisition becomes remarkably better in a hurry. He has not passed the FCAT in Reading; on the contrary, his score on it is particularly low. He comes from a poor working-class family, and I suspect he had a very chaotic education in Haiti; his study skills and organizational skills are virtually

non-existent and he tends to not be focused, to lose or forget his work, get off-task easily, leave his seat occasionally, dream, sleep, chat in Creole, and otherwise fritter his classroom time away instead of using it for purposeful activities in learning goals. Ivan was taught in Haiti in French, but is not able to form correct or comprehensible sentences in the French language to accomplish any responses to writing prompts in the ESOL classroom, so if and when he was attempting to respond in French (with permission from myself, early in the school-year), his writings were disorganized gibberish. His classroom behavior is immature, and he acts like he lacks any sense of direction or intrinsic motivation. Most teachers feel that they cannot help him and that he is not doing what he should be doing in high school; he also had a bad personality-conflict with one of his teachers this past year, about which we often heard at length. I have been told that he is somewhat older than his 'school' birth certificate of age 17, he is now as much as 20 years old, perhaps. Nevertheless and notwithstanding his very slow, rather discouraging progress, Ivan is very sweet-natured, shy, respectful, gentle, dreamy/spacy, and likeable. I feel sorry for him and worry about his future.

13) Last of the males comes "Renaud", a severely underachieving young man who I believe to be older than his 'school' birth certificate. 'It' claims that he is 17, but I believe him to be in the neighborhood of 20 years old. Renaud was retained and will repeat 11<sup>th</sup> grade this coming fall of 2005. He has 10 credits and a 1.26 GPA, both very worrisome, and he has not passed the Reading FCAT. Renaud is entirely caught up in segmentary assimilation: the academic underachieving and failure, the oppositional sub-culture, the extreme gangsta/rapper look with pants belted well below his posterior, t-shirts two miles long, every expensive brand-name outfit matching in every detail from

top to toe, gold jewelry, an entire mouthful of gold-capped teeth, the constant presence of a cell-phone in his hand, and the hint/aura of possible gang or drug activity clinging to him. The gold capped teeth have distorted his speech clarity a bit. He is being raised by his mother alone, and she is very hard-working, but I do wonder where all those expensive clothes and gold teeth are coming from. When Renaud gets in disciplinary trouble at school, which he does quite often, not only does he have the school's punishment (time in the internal suspension room, or a few days suspension from school), but also his mother beats him or whips him severely at home – it always amazes me that he stands still and takes his beating, at his age and size. (Once I asked my paraprofessional “Why does Renaud take such a bad beating from his mother without running away or getting the upper hand physically with her?” and he answered me, “She would kill him if he did that and he knows it!”) He has been in Florida for four years. He is the type of young man who never carries any book, notebook, paper, pen, or school-work. He arrives tardy to classes and seems unconcernedly above-the-rules, although much pressure is exerted school-wide to change that tardiness behavior. On the other hand, he keeps himself to himself in my class, at least, and if he doesn't do his work, at least he is not constantly disrupting his peers. His English oral/aural skills are at a mid-intermediate level, with slightly Creole-accented speech (understandable) and a patterning of African-American Ebonics grammar and syntax overlaid. His English reading and writing skills are abysmally low for his age; I would estimate them at the third-grade level at best. He was educated in French in Haiti, but he does not indicate that he ever made much meaning out of anything in French, or got much out of the instruction overall, in his Haitian schools; on the contrary, he has low general knowledge



and low literacy skills, and does not comprehend conversational spoken French now. The rumors that swirl around him of gang-related activity (or being on the fringes of a gang's activity, or a gang-wannabe, or a macho-man wannabe) and the fact that he very often gets into physical fights with Hispanics on the streets of his neighborhood make Renaud the male student who worries us the most constantly. Can we turn him around by keeping up the pressure and concern? Will he get his grades and GPA up? Can he possibly ever pass the Reading FCAT? Does he have any hope of getting a high school diploma? What will become of him on the outside, in that forum where the majority of his life exists – the streets? Will he get knifed or shot by a gang? What can his future career-path possibly be? I am one of the few teachers, I think, who cares about Renaud. In spite of his consistent academic underachievement, he likes and respects me and I like him. He has a hidden sweetness, and a sly humor which he uses to tease me by telling me “whoppers” (tall tales) and then looking at me out of the corners of his eyes, keeping a deadpan face but with eyes gleefully waiting to see my reaction. Renaud's eyes betray him to me on another front – he doesn't really ‘want’ to be a low-functioning, low-literate underachiever, but he doesn't know how to get out of all of these modes of behavior, so he acts like “the big man with the cell phone and business contacts” as a cover, to save face. And I do not know how to fix all of Renaud's academic and behavioral/social problems.

14) “Nancy” is a female senior who just graduated with a certificate of completion; she did not pass the FCAT Reading exam. She had enough credits, a 2.91 GPA, and good attendance. I believe (and so do the Haitian paraprofessionals) that she is much, much older than the age on her ‘school’ birth certificate – I think she is as much as 25 or

26, really a woman, not an adolescent. Nancy dresses appropriately, like a plump Haitian-American woman, neither very stylishly nor too dowdy, but her skirts are usually longer, never minis. She wears her natural hair (in a short ponytail or bun) or a very simply-styled wig. She is maturely well-behaved in classrooms. She is good-humored and respectful, and always, always does her work. Her humor is of an earthy, easy-going sort, full of puns and jokes and double-entendres in Creole, which is recognizable as “typically Haitian”, so I always called her my “real Haitian female” to myself and the paras. Due to her consistent work-habits and organizational skills, and the translation/explanation help of the paras, Nancy was able to pass all of her Florida high school classes over the three years that she has been here. Nevertheless, I think that she has low reading comprehension, perhaps on a fourth-grade level or so (she will likely never pass the 10<sup>th</sup> grade level Reading FCAT) and actually has a rather poor grasp of the English-language literacy skills. Her oral/aural English is mid-intermediate at best. Basically, without prejudice or pejorativeness, and informally, I think that Nancy has a low-normal IQ and is going to become a housewife and mother, remaining in the Haitian community, speaking the same heavily-Creole-accented English at the same level of functioning, perhaps running a small shop or informal sales or cooking business, and keeping Haiti (and Haitian behavioral/cultural mores) as her primary points of reference here in Florida.

15) “Madeline” is an extremely assimilated young woman (‘segmentary style’) who I believe is really the 16 years of age that her ‘school’ birth certificate states. She had first arrived in our school district in Florida from Haiti four years ago, in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, but then after a year of disciplinary problems and turmoil here, she was sent away to relatives in

New York, remaining in NY for slightly over two years. The period of time in schools in New York gave her 'good' English-language skills: I would say she is functioning on a lower-advanced range, with her oral/aural near-perfect (and unaccented, except by slight African-American Ebonics imitative speech-patterns) and her English reading and writing being the closest to 10<sup>th</sup> grade level of any of the students in my focus group, except for one other female who follows this one's description. Unfortunately she was retained back into 10<sup>th</sup> grade again for next year due to her attendance issues (loss of course-credits due to too many absences over the semester). Madeline dresses in extremely fashionable, expensive outfits of brand-name clothing, urban rapper/gangsta-girl style, with very short skirts or very tight jeans, high-heeled go-go boots or kitten-heeled sandals, multiple complicated wigs and daily changes of hairdos (we have actually never seen her real hair 'au naturel'), jewelry and accessories, a cell phone, etc. Due to her prior appearance in our school district, and that year's history of discipline problems, Madeline has a reputation among the Haitians as being a 'wild girl', a reputation which she is currently waffling about, alternating trying to shed it while remaining still somehow 'hip', 'in' and 'modern'. I believe that she is very intelligent and should pass the FCAT before her graduation, although she did not pass it on her first attempt in March 2005. She has a 3.20 GPA. Madeline was taught in French in Haiti and seems to have a 'decent' level of general knowledge as well as fairly high literacy and organizational skills. She comes from a working-class family who do not know what to make of their modern assimilated "American" daughter. I have high hopes for Madeline, in spite of her tendency towards segmentary, urban-poor-influenced assimilation styles, and she is (secretly) one of my favorites. She responds very well to the role-model I

provide for her of a female who is steady of character, conscientious, caring and goal-oriented. My particular mix of affective and academic styles is the one that Madeline seems to need. She loves me and comes in earlier than her class-time every day to greet me and hug me. Due to my being aware that her absences were mostly due to not waking up in the morning, rather than any willful desire to miss school again, and that her mother was already gone out to work before 5:30 a.m., frequently I telephone Madeline to wake her at 5:40, and now she calls me “Mom” sometimes. She knows that I am Very Disappointed (capital V, capital D) in her whenever she gets in trouble at school, and I know that my disappointment matters to her.

16) “Sabina” is an extremely intelligent but somewhat immature adolescent of about 17 or 18 (I think her ‘school’ birth certificate shows her real age or perhaps is only about one year off, so she could be 19), and is one of only two Haitian females, with Madeline, who will engage in noisy /loud classroom banter, joking, and innuendo with Haitian males in my classroom. She has completed 11<sup>th</sup> grade successfully and is promoted and entering her senior year in the fall of 2005. She has enough credits, she has good attendance, she has a 3.37 GPA, and she has passed both the Math and the Reading FCAT exams, so she is completely on track for next year’s graduation and a ‘real’ diploma. She dresses appropriately but not with any extremes of fashion, and never has very short skirts or very tight jeans. She sometimes has her hair done professionally but in non-extreme, simple/attractive female styles; otherwise she just wears her hair natural, combed back into a tight little bun or ponytail. Sabina functions on a very high metacognitive level and commented most insightfully and analytically on all of the focus questions of my study. Equally, her classroom writing in response to any and all prompts

was mature, in usually correct grade-level written English, manifesting high metacognition, synthesis and analysis skills throughout the school-year. Interestingly enough, and in counterpoint to her persona when writing, in the classroom, interpersonally or behavior-wise she is loud, raucous, has trouble calming down, laughs uproariously/ noisily and at length for any little thing that happens or is said, also yells and gets upset easily at her peers, and is just in general over-the-top in her behavior. She is somewhat of a ‘rough diamond’ and comes from a working-class family. Her spoken English is Creole-accented but all of her oral/aural is on the advanced level, as are her reading and writing skills. She has been in Florida for four years. Sabina had a ‘good’ education in French in Haiti, and seems to have been paying attention to it at the time, since she got a lot of lasting benefits out of it – she is organized, she has an excellent academic work-ethic, she has ‘some’ general knowledge about the world, she knows how to write complicated and comprehensible sentences and can read on grade-level in English and comprehend what she reads. Sabina has stated that she would like to be a pediatrician, but I am sure that she doesn’t realize how many years of school and dedication that entails. On her current academic track, I have hope that Sabina can obtain a scholarship of some kind, go to university, and get on a really good career track.

17) “Isaline” is a modest female adolescent of 17 years of age (I am quite sure that it is her correct age) with a hare-lip, which makes her speech in “any” language difficult to understand for her interlocutors. She does seem to have a heavy Creole accent when she speaks English, and I frequently have to ask her to repeat whatever she said to me three or four times. She had been selected this past year, due to various logistical factors, to be one of the “Creole reporters” for the school TV’s weekly “Cultural Connections Show:

Creole News” broadcast, a job for which she was neither linguistically nor intellectually nor temperamentally suited. I believe, informally, that Isaline comes from a working-class family, has a low-normal IQ and a very poor educational background from her schools in Haiti. She is entering her senior year, with a 2.52 GPA, having successfully completed enough credits in Florida through her 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade years, plus her Haitian transcript credits, to be promoted. She has not passed the Reading FCAT (and I privately doubt that she is going to be capable of doing so any time soon). She has been in Florida for three years. Her reading comprehension and writing skills in English are particularly low, probably on a second or third grade level. She is gentle, sweet and shy, usually. Her reading comprehension bothers me as her teacher, because she doesn’t seem to understand what we mean by ‘comprehension’ of text, really. She seems a bit helpless academically, albeit willing, and prefers working collaboratively with any and all female peers who can help her. She is not assimilated to American youth behavior to any great extent. She hangs around with the shyest, most modest and most religious Haitian females, who all dress slightly dowdily (but not painfully so) and wear their natural hair only, in little buns or ponytails. Isaline has a good work ethic for her academics, she tries; and she expresses sentiments and value-statements concerning the importance of having ‘good behavior’ and a ‘good reputation’ and ‘getting good grades’. One additional factor is that she has constant behavior/social issues with the student “Renaud” (above), they quarrel, they squabble, they throw things at each other, they pinch, poke, and push each other, they insult each other; they just bother each other and can’t get along, no matter how many times they are sent to school-based, student-run mediation or to the discipline deans. Isaline always ends up crying hysterically after these incidents

with Renaud, and blaming him / complaining bitterly about him, although (uncharacteristically, but I have seen this with my own eyes) at least half of the incidents are Isaline's own fault and she is the initiator or first provoker. If Isaline is in love with Renaud (which is what many of us think), her way of 'showing' it is annoying to everyone.

18) "Radella" is an extremely shy/reserved, extremely quiet, modest, petite female of about 18 and a half years of age, probably her true age. She comes from a middle-class Haitian family with clearly repressive and/or strict notions of 'correct' female behavior and upbringing, judging by her consistent behavior, non-assimilated dress styles and simple hairdos. She expresses sentiments like "I'm going to be a good nice girl". She has been in Florida for two and a half years. She just graduated high school in May 2005, 3.54 GPA, but with a certificate of completion, not a real standard diploma, because she couldn't pass the reading FCAT. I believe this is due exclusively to her language barrier as an LY student acquiring English as her L3, and the 'possible' rate of speed of language acquisition, particularly reading comprehension, required to get to the tenth-grade level of functioning. I cannot say that Radella acts "maturely", per se, because she seems to me to be acting in a "repressed" manner. Radella is painfully shy and never opens her mouth in the classroom. She never asks questions or interacts with anyone in any way, neither peers (unless directly told to do so via collaborative-group structure) nor teacher. She keeps her eyes down, too. It is usually impossible to tell if she 'understands' what is going on or being said, if she 'understands' the assignment or task that she is supposed to do, if she 'wants to know more', 'needs to know more', or if she 'thinks' anything at all. She has an excellent academic work-ethic, always does all her work punctually, and

actually performs written tasks in English on about a sixth or seventh grade level, which is “good” for my LEP groups of students. Her sentences are entirely sensible and comprehensible, although they contain grammar and syntax errors. Her writing tends to be rather trite overall. She was educated in French in Haiti and has remained literate in that language until now. On the other hand, I think that her Haitian school’s learning/teaching style favored memorization and regurgitation, leaving Radella with a good daily work-ethic but only vague ideas about personal semi-comprehension of texts, much less higher-order thinking skills like analysis and synthesis, which she has never performed for me in speaking or writing in two and a half years of having her in class. She did not show up for the June (post-graduation) FCAT exam administration opportunity. I do not know what her career aspirations are.

19) “Naomi” is a skeletally thin female of 19 (I believe it is her real age) who just graduated from high school in May 2005, although she did not pass the Reading FCAT and only has a certificate of completion. She dresses extremely stylishly, with very tight skirts or tight jeans (but she probably only weighs 90 pounds at most), very high heels and elaborately-styled hairdos or wigs. Her oral/aural English is near-perfect, with a faint trace of a Creole accent, and her reading and writing skills in English are at about an 8<sup>th</sup>-grade level (which is ‘high’ for my LEP classes). Although her IQ seems normal, anecdotally Naomi has “no” general knowledge about anything in the world (!), neither past, present nor future, and she doesn’t seem to care about learning anything much. She did a minimum of work to get by in her classes, and had a 2.47 final GPA. She had good attendance. She is outwardly friendly enough on a surface level, but she is aloof. She shrugs and says, “I don’t know” every day, with no apparent interest in ever ‘finding out’



the things she doesn't know. She has been in Florida for five years. She is a middle-of-the-road kind of female in her assimilation style, other than in her dress, acting neither particularly Haitian nor 'acting white' nor anything else. I believe she prefers to hang around with stylishly thin African-American female friends who look and act similar to herself, although her boyfriend is a Haitian male of about 23. Naomi is rather an enigma to me, I don't know why she has not passed the FCAT (after multiple attempts), since she seems basically 'competent enough' overall, if on the uninterested/ uninformed side of the population. Maybe her very lack of general and prior knowledge about all topics makes her unable to make the necessary connections, analyses, inferences and etc. on the Reading FCAT.

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